

Reading Julia Kristeva: Estrangement and the

Female Intellectual

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II. ABSTRACT

This study is concerned with the interrelationship between estrangement and the place of the female intellectual in a selection of texts by Julia Kristeva. The alterity of language - which Kristeva takes to be language in its affective aspect - is read as a critique of notions of presence and transcendence that have governed our expectations about the meaning of identity and the nature of reading. When a material texture is restored to language it estranges thought and discourse. The subject-in-process announced by Kristeva is thus both the sign and symptom of estrangement, a subject that has been evacuated of any essential identity. At the same time it is established that there is a subtle privileging of the female (as intellectual) in Kristeva's work. This privileged site of enunciation often appears to be at variance with the former emphasis on estrangement.

However the study discovers that later texts, in particular *Tales of Love*, reconcile these two ambivalent operations by posing the value of the Imaginary Father. When subjectivity is seen to be in loving relation to an imaginary other, estrangement and relations of hostility are transformed by a new understanding of what it means to be at home with the self and in love with the other. Through examining persistent shifts in Kristeva between spaces of dwelling and exile, I argue that the virtues of homelessness increasingly give place to reading subjects in need of care and renewal. Although the early fascination with the estranging qualities of language persists, I conclude that openness to the speech of the other is the most lasting quality in Kristeva's writing that recognises, without valorising, feminine specificity.

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IV. ABBREVIATIONS

Kristeva More extensive details are to be found in the bibliography

English texts:

ACW *About Chinese Women*

"ANT" "A New Type of Intellectual: the Dissident"

BS *Black Sun*

Desire *Desire in Language*

LtU *Language the Unknown*

"MMH" "My Memory's Hyperbole"

"Oscillation" "Oscillation Between Power and Denial"

Powers *Powers of Horror*

"PatP" "Psychoanalysis and the Polis"

RPL *Revolution in Poetic Language*

"SN" "Say Nothing"

Tales *Tales of Love*

"Talking" "Talking About Polylogue"

"TLW" "The Last Word of this Adventure"

"WT" "Women's Time"

French texts:

"DINY" "D'Ithaca à New York"

Etrangers *Etrangers à nous-mêmes*

LS *Les Samourais*

Pouvoirs *Pouvoirs de l'horreur*

RLP *Révolution du langage poétique*

Sém *Séméiotiké*

Freud

SE followed by volume number

Unless otherwise indicated, all references to Freud are from the *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1951-73).

INTRODUCTION

Schopenhauer once wrote of how the common mass of people lived existence as if surrounded by the smells of a perfume shop - so engendered were they by its environment, that they were unable to recognise its distinctive beauty. Anyone who has taken the trouble to reflect on the nature of perception will agree with Schopenhauer that the means we have for registering information about the world that surrounds us is constrained and filtered through the screen of habit. From the rituals of daily routine to the paradigms that construct our experiences of reality, perception does indeed have a regularised quality which if we notice it at all, we find profoundly comforting. One of the distinctive aspects to creative thought is the conviction that perception could (and should) be something quite different. Curious inquiry, so the assumption goes, re-presents the heady sensations of experience, or at least the means to understand them. Through prising off the carapace of routine, criticism allows the intellectual to extend the boundaries of what can be said about an experience. In different ways, philosophy and literature have sought procedures that would estrange the object of perception in order to render it paradoxically more beautiful, more knowable, or both. It is not an exaggeration to assert that estrangement of some kind, in fact, is presupposed by all forms of critical analysis.

What do we understand by the word, *estrangement*? Is it best reflected by the Russian formalists' concept of "defamiliarisation" (*ostranenie*) that sought to counter automatised perception and stale overused poetic conventions by making language (and reading) strange? Is it closer to "alienation" (*Entfremdung*) which Hegel used to describe the self-estrangement of mind into matter, and which Marx instinctively acknowledged when he spoke of the alienating relations under capitalism: "all that is solid melts into air"?¹ Is it the instan-

¹ For information on the use of self-estrangement in Marx, see Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1938), pp. 202-3. The quotation from Marx's

taneous flash of recognition, somewhat in the manner of an epiphany, that tells us something for which we had been seeking was present all along, and which Hegel expresses as the Absolute revealing itself to the subject as "from the outset in and for itself beside us and [who] wants to be beside us"?² Or does Julia Kristeva's reading of abjection which puts the subject beside himself with horror come closest to estrangement?³ The Oxford English Dictionary lists at least nine entries for estrangement including: to remove something from its familiar place; to make someone a stranger to a condition or place; to withhold from a person's perception or knowledge; to render alien; to alienate in feeling or affection; to make unlike oneself; to render strange or unfamiliar in appearance; to be astonished (*obs.*). Each of these cases, however apparently diverse, arises out of a shift of perception. There is a change in a state of affairs that the consciousness registers as a form of loss or difference, as the habitual suddenly or by degrees is transformed into the site of exile, discomfort, and sometimes novelty, astonishment, or awe.

When the Russian formalist Victor Shklovsky wrote that "art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*",⁴ it was precisely this latter experience of novel perception that he was reaching for. Although Shklovsky was concerned that habitual perception devoured one's appreciation for the daily activities of life, including those one loved, his preoccupation with defamiliarisation was directed towards estranging perception as an end in itself. Unlike the scientist, the writer seeks to make his representation of perception dense: formal texture in literature works not to produce knowledge but to elevate the aesthetic function, and accordingly its

Communist Manifesto is cited in Marshall Berman's *All That is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), p. 95.

² In Hegel's Introduction to the *Phenomenology* and quoted by Kristeva in *Tales of Love*, trans. Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), p. 39. Originally published as *Histoires d'amour* (Paris: Denoel, 1983).

³ *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982). Originally published as *Pouvoirs de l'horreur. Essai sur l'abjection* (Paris: Seuil, 1980).

⁴ "Art as technique" in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, trans. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), p. 12.

characteristics must be "roughened", "difficult" and "impeded". The work carried out by the Formalists into the nature of poetic language and the autonomy of the aesthetic function⁵ is an invaluable beginning to a study of estrangement, but also a limited one. Some of Julia Kristeva's earliest essays indicate a debt to such thinking but moved far beyond its limitations.

In "The Ethics of Linguistics", Kristeva congratulates the linguist Roman Jakobson for his sensitive listening to the phonic textures of language. Despite his inability to make of this texture a function which would radically challenge the linguist's penchant for lucid models, Kristeva saw that the scope of "poetic language" could be enlarged to incorporate "a heterogeneous, destructive causality."⁶ From this essay arises the claim that the new theorist of poetic language will depart from the strict rigours of science and pass across "whole geographic and discursive continents as an impertinent traveller, a 'faun in the house' "[*faune au logis / phonologie*]. (*Desire* : 32) He or she will be a stranger to language, at home with no single model or theory. The new theorist will be an inventive traveller borrowing from numerous discourses, always sensitive to the estranging nature of rhythm and its violent clash with history. Such impertinence is the only means, Kristeva insists, whereby the subject may redraw the boundaries that define the nature of his existence. For Kristeva, poetic language was the key to estranging perception and, more ambitiously, all thought, because it introduced heterogeneity into signifying structures and subjective identity. When language became dense with phonic textures and semantic associations, it acted as an entry-point for the drives to transfer their

⁵ Here is Roman Jakobson on the nature of the aesthetic function: "What we have been trying to show is that art is an integral part of the social structure, a component that interacts with all the others and is itself mutable since both the domain of art and its relationship to the other constituents of the social structure are in constant dialectical flux. What we stand for is not the separation of art but the autonomy of the aesthetic function." "What is Poetry?", *Selected Writings, Vol III* (the Hague: Mouton, 1981), pp. 749-50.

⁶ Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, trans. Thomas S. Gora, Alice Jardine and Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 27. A collection of essays from various sources, eight of which were originally published in *Polylogue* (Paris: Seuil, 1977).

psychic imprints from the unconscious directly into signification, causing it to falter and renew itself. The subject of poetic language is the product of this discharge into signification, his identity and his "space" being simultaneously destroyed and recreated by the pressures exerted on language from an affect-driven body. Neither at home with himself nor his speech, he is restless wherever he finds himself; an exile to all origins and habitual pursuits, he is the perfect example of the stranger who never settles in.

Much of Kristeva's writing gives the impression that the language of exile is the only language worth knowing, especially for intellectuals who are called to know differently. "How can one avoid sinking into the mire of common sense," she asks, "if not by becoming a stranger to one's own country, language, sex and identity? Writing is impossible without some kind of exile."⁷ This brief statement encapsulates the many different forms of thought which will be challenged and estranged by her readings of semiotics and psychoanalysis. Writing demands that the exile refuses to take comfort in narcissistic regression to his maternal origins or in clinging to a singular identity. Subjectivity is heterogeneous, and the exile is most "at home" with an intolerable excess in language that effects "multiple sublations of the unnameable, the unrepresentable, the void." ("ANT": 300) In short, alterity founds questions of origin and identity, and provides the grounds for reading differently.

The heterogeneity that is a product of constant creativity and loss within language and the subject rejects a transcendent form of incarnation. There can be no "big bang" theory able to generate the kind of revolutionary poetics that explicitly rejects One Meaning in all of its aspects. Nevertheless Kristeva appeals to the language of epiphany and apocalypse to elaborate the earth shaking nature of those borderline states of language and human experience which continue to

⁷ "A New Type of Intellectual: the Dissident", trans. Seán Hand in Toril Moi ed., *The Kristeva Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 298. Originally published in *Tel Quel*, No. 74, (Winter 1977), pp. 3-8 as: "Un nouveau type d'intellectuel: le dissident".

fascinate her. Poetic language is revolutionary because it redefines the subject as a "man-process" recognising not the linear time of history, but time as rupture and discontinuity: *Apocalypse Now*. That time when the mountains smoke and the gods descend is over, but the notion of an estranging intervention in history that *re-arranges space* is repeatedly invoked in Kristeva's texts. From the "flash" of conception in "Stabat Mater"⁸ to the "flash" of forgiveness in *Black Sun*,⁹ the language of origin finds a new place in a discourse that *plays* with origins but does not believe in them.

As a consequence, if language plays with origins, there can be no privileging of one form of identity. The subject is multiple, not singular, and identity is at least double, as Kristeva's reading of Lautréamont shows in *Revolution in Poetic Language*.¹⁰ The author's enunciation is at once product and a continuous production, dissected by the voices of others and always already oriented to the Other (culture, language, the unconscious). We cannot then allocate a permanently privileged position in the language of the text for *women*, since this would merely affirm a rigidity of meaning which Kristeva wishes to displace. There are periods in her writing when femininity is linked to the destabilising qualities of poetic language (the "semiotic") but these instances equally ensure that there is no room here for a female subject to take up permanent residence. However, it does appear that while the quest for estrangement in one sense dissolves sexual identities, at other times Kristeva has granted women exemplary status as strangers and exiles, whose place on the margins of public discourse potentially gives them a special indifference to "the mire of common sense".

⁸ In *Tales*, pp. 234-263.

⁹ *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. Leon Roudiez (Columbia University Press, 1989). Originally published as *Soleil noir, dépression et mélancolie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987).

¹⁰ Trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982). Originally published as *La Révolution du langage poétique. L'avant-garde à la fin du XIXe siècle. Lautréamont et Mallarmé* (Paris: Seuil, 1974).

Estrangement therefore lies at the heart of subjectivity just as it problematises our relation to a transcendent Other. Yet perhaps it has an even more profound effect on the nature of the reading contract. Speech and writing presuppose an interlocutor to whom I address my desires. I constrain my aggression and my need to devour by constructing subjectivity in loving relation to an other. My sense of space is redefined. In so doing, I am subject to constant change and renewal, for as I enter into conversation, "my" speech, "my" opinions become "ours", and meaning becomes pluralised, enriched. We leave each contract permanently altered but hopefully, not absolute masters. What is meaning, then? As Heidegger reminds us, "every metaphysical question can be asked only in such a way that the questioner as such is present together with the question, that is, is placed in question."¹¹ In reading and writing on strangeness, I am constructed and deconstructed, formed and reformed when my own thinking, my own questions, intersect with the texts of others. This recognition to my mind lies at the centre of Kristeva's writing, which sets out the limits of subjectivity even as it explores the means to exceed those limits.

In the chapters that follow I intend to bring into relation the three variables of estrangement, Julia Kristeva, and the female intellectual, and I shall ask what kind of a relationship is established between criticism, identity, and alterity in a selection of her texts. Kristeva's thought has a confessed anti-phenomenological cast but it cannot abandon notions of presence and identity altogether. For this reason, despite the fact that a concept like the female intellectual never gains absolute hold, its problematic nature can still be read in the silences and ellipses of Kristevan discourse as much as in those places where the question is under explicit discussion.

To give my investigation of estrangement a tighter focus, my readings of Kristeva in Part Two of the thesis will be organised around metaphors of

¹¹ *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), "What is Metaphysics?", pp. 95-96.

dwelling and inhabiting. I will examine the dual nature of the dilemma that confronts the theorist when she deconstructs the exterior space assumed by a metaphysics of presence. While taking on the status of an exile who wanders from place to place, the subject must also face moments when he cannot escape being crushed by space. Exile presupposes a certain distance from the intimate spaces of home; its preferred spaces are disfigured dwellings, and strange hostile places outside "common sense". When all notions of exteriority are discredited however, the ensuing *lack* of space becomes a problem for the subject (and the reader). In this sense, strangeness is an affect imaginatively experienced by the reader and strategically produced by Kristeva's language as much as it is a recurring theme for reflection. I pay particular attention to the literary element of my chosen texts in the emphasis I give to the affective world they create and the intuitive associations I bring to this world. Paul de Man, speaking of the presence of a "critical element" within literature observed that:

the critical and the poetic components are so closely intertwined that it is impossible to touch the one without coming into contact with the other. It can be said of these works that they carry a constitutive critical element within themselves, exactly as Friedrich Schlegel, at the onset of the nineteenth century, characterized all 'modern' literature by the ineluctable presence of a critical dimension. If this is true, then the opposite is just as likely, and critics can be granted the full authority of literary authorship.¹²

Although wishing to make a distinction between literature and criticism, I am nevertheless sensitive to the aesthetic function of critical texts, and my analysis attempts to bring this function into play. However, I equally endorse the injunction that criticism involves mastery as well as play, which entails a position that involves "resting on the brink of fiction without ever completely toppling over into it". (*Desire*: ix) Criticism calls for analytical distance as well as recognising excess and play. In this I am merely echoing Kristeva's own judgement that

¹² "The Literary Self as Origin: the Work of Georges Poulet", in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 80.

distinguishes theoretical discourse from fiction in the former's emphasis on logical argument and the Law.¹³

Chapter One presents a study of estrangement, female subjectivity and reading, and attempts to bring these three apparently disparate terms into relation. In a relatively self-contained *Chapter Two*, I briefly examine the nature of the intellectual world which welcomed Kristeva when she first arrived in Paris. While the chapter is not strictly necessary for the development of the thesis, it affords a useful socio-historical background¹⁴ to the admittedly textual readings of Kristeva and estrangement that follow. What concerns me in this second chapter as much as the already well known debates of the period are the nature of the Paris revolution in May 1968, and the rise of French feminism. These two events are of interest since in different ways they provided the context against which Kristeva, at least until the mid-seventies, would address the relation between language and women. *Chapter Three* offers a reading of *Revolution in Poetic Language* that explores the unsettling effects of its thought. Concept and style are read as mutually reinforcing functions of an estranging textual universe with a distinctive topography. In this unfamiliar place, the subject of language is not at home with himself or his speech; instead he discovers himself to be in an ambivalent environment that wavers between destruction and jouissance. *Chapter Four* again takes up the two variables of home and place as they appear in the most archaic site of home: the mother's body. In this final chapter I argue that when Kristeva begins to approach such an intimate but unhomely place, abjection appears on the scene: a terrifying form of estrangement that can only be lifted with the intervention of a loving third term. This chapter in particular attempts to map the interventions of a discourse in the text that interrogates feminine subjectivity. I consider the form of privilege accorded to that

¹³ See Kristeva's preface to *Desire* where she emphasises the critical nature of her work as opposed to its literary dimensions. (pp. ix-x)

¹⁴ Similar material is covered by Elizabeth Grosz in *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989); and John Lechte in *Julia Kristeva* (London: Routledge, 1990).

subjectivity, and ask to what extent it is overridden by the style of other questions. The *Conclusion* returns to the themes of home, inhabiting, and estrangement to examine whether the notion of ethics implied by the category of the female intellectual may be the necessary corrective to what Ludwig Binswanger has named *Verstiegenheit*, the dangers of overreaching oneself.

Note: Throughout this thesis I have made consistent reference to the subject of language in the masculine, and have usually referred to the reader as plural or feminine. The decision to do so reflects in part a desire to align myself with Kristeva's own enunciative strategies in this regard, and partly a feeling that such a division between "he" and "she" reflects both textual tidiness and a primitive kind of fairness. I have consciously opted for a strategy that does not fully concur with recent conventions of reading and writing where an inclusive subject is used as a matter of course.

PART ONE

INTRODUCING THE SUBJECT

CHAPTER ONE

"STRANGERS TO OURSELVES"

1. 1. Estrangement: a "dazzling obscurity"

We spend a good deal of our lives living in what Heidegger took to be the blanched anaemia of the present. Humdrum reality sticks to us as *papier mâché* composes familiar shapes and forms. Daily the discourse of routine and habitual thought builds its accretions over and through us. It is almost as if we viewed reality through a transparent but resilient skin, or from the far side of a room filled with smoke. Julia Kristeva has argued that this particular structure of perception is a turning away from or a mediation of what lies beyond and is indispensable for human survival: "The love of death, the desire of death is the secret on which we close our eyes in order to be able to look without seeing, to sleep and to dream. If we were not to close our eyes, we would only see emptiness, dark, blanks and broken forms."¹ But to make the leap from assuming there may be a less mediated reality lying in wait for us, to concluding with Kristeva that any "beyond" comprehends an unacknowledged desire for the darkness of death is to move too quickly. What we *can* assert is that any thoughtful response to the question of life and how we live it has always involved a recognition that the time of "this world", the time taken up with attending to our human needs and demands, is shot through with a longing for something else, for an inhabiting and in-dwelling that welcomes strangeness as a beloved guest.

¹ *Les Samourais* (Paris: Fayard, 1990), p. 11. These words are actually spoken by the central character of Kristeva's novel, Joelle Cabarus, a psychoanalyst.

How is the encounter with strangeness represented? Sometimes as an event that occurs all at once in a flash, dazzling us with its novelty, its sheer alterity. Hegel wrote of this dazzling in terms of a sunburst: "The frivolity and boredom which unsettle the established order, the vague foreboding of something unknown, these are the heralds of approaching change. The gradual crumbling that left unaltered the face of the whole is cut short by a sunburst which, in one flash, illuminates the features of the new world."² Illumination akin to an epiphany occurs in the twinkling of an eye, in an instant, flooding our vision with a sense of the unknown. It is a catastrophic movement from darkness to light that defies the limits of history and time. For a moment, the world and our perceptions seem rinsed and sparkle with clarity and we come face to face with a strangeness that is as much loving as it may be terrifying. In fact, joy rather than terror may be the more frequent response to an encounter with the unknown. Something has occurred - a radical shifting of the patterns we impose on reality? a transference of meaning from one place to another? an infusion of life into worn speech and gestures? In each case the event is momentous enough to cause us to return again and again to it through memory and to invoke it as foundational, or at the very least, germane to new ways of looking at things. Surprise is the hallmark of this form of strangeness, and joy its most frequent companion.

Let us provisionally name such a blinding revelation of presence, "epiphany". From the Greek "to manifest, to show", epiphany has traditionally been used to designate the revelation of some divine or superhuman being, although it has recently acquired currency as a figurative or secularised equivalent to account for moments of striking perception.³ In modern literature the classic account of

² *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), pp. 6-7. Hegel at this point is actually referring to the sublation of the dialectic. The object, when acted on by consciousness, results in the subject's transformation, a change which Hegel represents as cosmic in its implications. Nevertheless, there is a sense in which the transformation is effected in concert with Absolute Mind, and so has a distinctly transcendent quality about it. For a more sustained discussion of this point, see Chapters 3 and 4.

³ See Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), where Kuhn had argued that a "revolution" occurred in the field of science when conceptual and observational categories were adjusted against a background of persistent and

striking perception amounting to an epiphany is given by Proust in *Remembrance of Things Past*. As he is crossing the cobbled courtyard belonging to the Princesse de Guermantes, Proust trips and his unexpected fall triggers a radiant memory of the Venice of his past: "a profound azure intoxicated my eyes, impressions of coolness, of dazzling light, swirled round me".⁴ Beckett eloquently recapitulates for us: "His surroundings vanish . . . he is stunned by waves of rapture, saturated in that same felicity that had irrigated so sparingly the desolation of his life. Drabness is obliterated in an intolerable brightness. And suddenly Venice emerges from the series of forgotten days . . . lifted from its Adriatic shore and set down, a bright and vehement interloper, in the courtyard of the Princesse de Guermantes."⁵ Other such chance incidents before and following occur equally "as if by magic", and usher in the same joy which is so powerful that it temporarily makes Proust indifferent to death and the passing of time.

The experience of estrangement as I have described it as epiphany, is *insistent*, "vehement", and also paradoxically blinding. The intensity of light, Beckett tells us, is "intolerable", yet its searing quality gives rise to illumination, even if this is transient. A particular everyday kind of clarity loses its moorings and founders in opacity at the same moment as something else bursts into consciousness, leaving what had gone before in the dark. However as other writers have also noted, luminosity brings its own reserve, since the subject both can and cannot look in the face of this light. Maurice Blanchot links the fascination of writing as occurring outside the space of dialectics within a "blinding light";⁶ Freud writes of the "sun-drenched face of the young Persian god [who] has remained

increasingly inexplicable novelty. Kuhn implied that what enabled a scientist to construct a new paradigm is a form of epiphany in language. For example, consult pp. 65 ff.

⁴ Proust, *Volume Three*, "Time Regained", trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin; and Andreas Major (London: Chatto and Windus, 1981), p. 899.

⁵ Samuel Beckett, *Proust*, in *Proust; 3 Dialogues: Samuel Beckett and Georges Duthuit* (London: John Calder, 1965), p. 70.

⁶ *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln, London: University of Nebraska, 1982), p. 33.

incomprehensible to us."⁷ Mallarmé in more obscure fashion designates the work of "the primitive thunderbolts of Logic"⁸ as a "distant reciprocity of fires".⁹

These moments of perception almost without exception involve an experience that however disturbing, presents itself to the consciousness as unique, unmediated, and foundational - an originary moment of presence. Beckett represents Proust's courtyard experience and the subsequent events as forms of a "miracle" occurring outside of the will. Some contingency unforeseen and unplanned by the subject gives rise to the return to consciousness of a memory, not in the form of an edited re-presented copy but "the sensation itself, annihilating every spatial and temporal restriction, [which] comes in a rush to engulf the subject in all the beauty of its infallible proportion."¹⁰ The point of this unpremeditated return, it is argued, is to reveal to us the power of Art to offer up through moments such as these its extratemporal, revivifying qualities to all who wish to "breathe the true air of Paradise, . . . the Paradise that has been lost."¹¹

Clearly, we are dealing with the realm of mystical experience here, a realm that has perhaps been too quickly passed over as "theological" and "always already nostalgic" by contemporary criticism. Today, the insistence on the deconstruction of presence and hence extratemporality ("Paradise"), has produced a new and less romantic paradigm that would disclose all such mysteries as unreadable textual inscriptions on the one hand, or as the return of the repressed on the other.¹² If,

⁷ From "Totem and Taboo", SE XIII (pp. 1-161), cited in *Tales*, p. 45.

⁸ From "Mystery in Literature" in *Mallarmé: Selected Prose Poems, Essays, and Letters*, trans. Bradford Cook (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1956), p. 32. Margaret Waller's translation of *Revolution in Poetic Language*, quoting Mallarmé, uses the expression, "lightning bolts" (p. 50).

⁹ RLP, p. 227. Bradford Cook's alternative translation of this passage reads: "Then quickly, before they die away, they all exchange their brilliancies from afar; or they may touch, and steal a furtive glance." (1956), p. 33. Note also the figure in Mallarmé's "Crisis in Verse": "during the last twenty-five years poetry has been visited by some nameless and absolute flash of lightning." Bradford Cook (1956), p. 41.

¹⁰ Beckett (1965), pp. 72-3.

¹¹ Beckett (1965), p. 74.

¹² Consult, for example, Jacques Derrida's essay "Differance" in *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, trans. David B. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), pp. 129-60. See also Paul de Man, "Reading: (Proust)" in *Allegories of Reading*:

as post-structuralism asserts, identity is only an endless weave of differences, any sense of mystery and conversely, enlightenment, must remain structured by the fabric of the text. Deconstruction reveals that any direct and immediate founding moment is a domestication of a much harsher truth: that the Logos is the necessary exteriority that language both assumes and tears apart. Kristeva's understanding of psychoanalysis, by comparison, would regard the origins of epiphany as residing in the shocks and contradictions of matter in endless process across the body of a subject. Both grammarology and post-Freudian psychoanalysis, however, would be equally insistent that transcendence in the way Proust may have understood it is impossible: all notions of exteriority are produced by, and remain within, language.

But can the notion of estrangement as at once illuminating and instantaneous still exist under these new impositions from the current theoretical dictionary? Is there still a place for a "blinding flash" that would come from *outside* the system and thus be in a position to renew it? Thomas Kuhn once remarked that when "paradigms change, the world itself changes with them."¹³ In a similar vein, Lacan wrote that "the slightest alteration in the relation between man and the signifier, in this case the procedures of exegesis, changes the whole course of history by modifying the moorings that anchor his being."¹⁴ How then do we represent strangeness in a post-Heideggerian vocabulary? What is being strange about today? What is strange about being?

Beginning with the way strangeness impinges on subjectivity, on how we live life, I am led to conclude that its quality as perception rests on its *difference* from other kinds of perception. My pleasure of the "now" in all its sensuous detail for

Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke and Proust (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 57-78; and Kristeva's reading of Hegel in *RPL*, pp. 114-6, 195-7.

¹³ Kuhn (1962), p. 111.

¹⁴ "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason Since Freud" in Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 1977), pp. 146-175. This reference, p. 174.

instance, belongs neither to the terrors of death, nor the joys of luminous experience that we have observed above. When I take in the calm blocks of silence on a hot day interrupted occasionally by the sound of water in distant pipes and house timbers creaking in the sun, when I watch the play of light and shade on the floor and an iridescent begonia sweating on the window-sill, then catch the pungent smell of burnt dust, I am responding to what is called "settled happiness", not "momentary joy".¹⁵ The sense of rootedness and connection these pleasurable experiences give me enhances my life and comforts me. They affirm my status as a being of and in this world. They add to my facticity, my "thisness", although they are more than purely instrumental, since in loving what is immediately outside of myself I am actively engaged in loving what is inside myself - the psyche. As Bachelard remarked in his marvellous book *The Poetics of Space*, "Isn't the exterior an old intimacy lost in the shadow of memory?"¹⁶ While not in themselves displacing reality, such pleasures in living and being are *enabling*: They sustain a venturing out of oneself in creative thought and, paradoxically, can provide the physical and psychic means to think loss, alterity and strangeness, since otherness is not necessarily dependent for its thinking on personal alienation. Quite the contrary, in fact, in Bachelard's text on poetry and space. On the other hand, when these simple and life affirming comforts are absent, and when thought truly does in all of its aspects find itself in exile, the glowing interiors of home observed as if from outside a window stand as the objects of our longing. Loss presents itself to the consciousness as the absence of *something*. In this instance, it is the unattainable quality of the *particular* object that we have once known, or long to know, that provides the means to think differently.

¹⁵ C.S. Lewis has distinguished between these two modes of perception in his autobiographical book, *Surprised by Joy: the Shape of My Early Life* (Glasgow: Collins, 1955). His account of an experience similar to Proust's is to be found on pp. 18-19 where his retelling of the "memory of a memory" is acknowledged to be the desire of desire. Except of course that for Lewis the longing is for God as the Other.

¹⁶ Gaston Bachelard, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 230.

Thinking differently does not of course usually resemble the entirely unpremeditated resurgence of exteriority or memory that Beckett finds in Proust. There are forms and degrees of estrangement, from moments that threaten to sweep away our old worlds and our selves with them, to less apocalyptic forms that result in heightened perception or give us cause to read the texts of our experience in a new way. Nonetheless, to begin a study of estrangement by reflecting on the nature of an unpremeditated, instantaneous experience is a recognition of the strategic implications of this space for language. Admit the possibility of such an event occurring outside discourse, and a First Cause is restored to thought, which in turn ushers in notions of transcendence and fixed identity. Surprisingly though, while Julia Kristeva argues that the subject's identity is *heterogeneous*, and affirms the eclipse of the Absolute Ideal (God),¹⁷ she continues to recognise the need for metaphysics, but redefines it as the incessant task of moving between a subjectivity shaped by the unconscious and an objectivity confirmed by relations with others. For this reason Kristeva believes that it is not possible to think beyond language to an exterior space, but she also acknowledges that moments of creation or upheaval are the product of ruptures in the symbolic crust: *biology made manifest*. These strange threshold events on the border of nature and culture are the moments that intrigue her, and their time is one of crisis, which her language registers in strikingly apocalyptic, metaphysical terms. From the vantage point of semiotics for example, she has argued that "Whether in the realm of metalanguage (mathematics, for example) or literature, what remodels the symbolic order is always the influx of the semiotic." (RPL: 62) The emergence of the semiotic (the modality of language that our rational, communicative order of experience attempts to constrain) is always accompanied by violence and a loss of identity, but its end result is the radical transformation and renewal of thought. Kristevan semiotics wrenched concepts away from their traditional supports and synthesised them into an estranging dialectics. If "God" or "Being" were ruth-

¹⁷ See her *In the Beginning was Love: Psychoanalysis and Faith*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987). Originally published as *Au commencement était l'amour. Psychanalyse et foi* (Paris: Hachette, 1985).

lessly dethroned, these gestures were always accompanied by the exhilaration that an old order was giving way before a new: "the *passage from one sign system to another* . . . involves an altering of the *thetic position* - the destruction of an old position and the formation of a new one." (RPL: 59) One way to read Kristeva's "revolution" in poetic language is as the correlative for a desacralised epiphany, since a language that estranges, that excavates categories of their denotational meaning and forges new syntagmatic chains of speech from traditionally hostile paradigms, is germane to revolutionary thought. While she would not support a Proustian extratemporality, the *desire* for the sudden presentation or return of a striking perception is unquestionably present in much of her work. Her determination approaches Mallarmé's: to summon and account for the production of the "primitive lightning bolts of logic" dressed in the limpid structures of syntax.

To what degree then, is the concept of an unmediated position compatible with Kristeva's post-phenomenological view of language? Undoubtedly, there can be no question of a transcendent entity - God or Art - who would temporarily lift the subject out of time. And where heterogeneity is the precondition for subjectivity, nor can there be a concession to perfect enlightenment or absolute knowledge. But in other respects, it appears that Kristeva still considers the mechanism of an interruption in time to be indispensable to establish language as a dialectical signifying structure capable of radical displacement. In "Stabat Mater" for example, epiphany receives explicit recognition in the account of conception as a "flash", an "instant of time or of dream without time . . . folding in unimaginable spaces . . . Flash on the unnameable, weavings of abstractions to be torn." (Tales: 234-5) The relation between Word and Flesh established here prioritises the intrusion of the real (all that lies beyond representation) into discourse. Although speech breaks up visions, it remains in necessary relation with an invisible, unnameable exterior - a manifestation of the "divine" perhaps? At the very least, an exterior whose "always already" existence estranges language and

identity when it breaks through resistances weakened by social, individual, and aesthetic crises.

One could hardly imagine these flashes of the unnameable as represented by Kristeva to lead to the kind of reconciled happiness described by Proust. When the real shatters temporality and speech it can be profoundly disturbing, even terrifying. Rather than a lucidity that can be analysed, the affects aroused by the real lead to an impossible confrontation between abjection and the sublime: "Not at all short of but always with and through perception and words, the sublime is a *something added* that expands us, overstrains us, and causes us to be both *here*, as dejects, and *there*, as others and sparkling." (*Powers*: 12) The sublime is the limitless, the boundless, the absolutely great that overwhelms with awe or terror. For Edmund Burke, the fundamental quality of the sublime lay in obscurity and a frustration of perception, not enlightenment.¹⁸ Language was the medium which best achieved sublimity, because lacking access to visual representation, it naturally harboured an excess of confused perceptions: "extreme light, by overcoming the organs of sight, obliterates all objects, so as in its effect exactly to resemble darkness".¹⁹ In fact, Burke's linkage of darkness and light in the one perceptual experience represents his belief that the sublime presupposed a union of two mutually antagonistic concepts. If we were to scrutinise the representation of epiphany therefore, we would discover that its blinding light hides a mystery - the unnameable, as Kristeva terms it.

Like Burke, Lacan found the prospect of visual eclipse seductive. At first glance indifferent to the mystical side of epiphany, Lacan linked both the *exaltation* that accompanies its perception and the *alienation* other writers have observed in the face of the sublime, to the experience that accompanies the "mirror-stage".

¹⁸ For a discussion of Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), see W.J.T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 125-129.

¹⁹ Quoted in Mitchell (1986), p. 128.

Indeed, the "jubilant assumption" which characterises the infant's reception of his first image of himself, his narcissistic ideal ego, bears all the qualities of exaltation and joy which we had earlier designated as belonging to that radically estranging form of perception experienced by Proust. Whereas Proust, however, views the perception as possessing miraculous and redemptive qualities, the identification that takes place in the mirror-stage lends the infant an *imago* which it *misrecognises* as its own. Thus the heart of subjectivity lies in a *failure* of identification, since the child is both joyfully at home with his new found image and tragically alienated from the "turbulent" activity that he feels actually composes his body.²⁰ Unfolded in this account of the alterity that lies at the heart of subjectivity we see two apparently opposed concepts of perception - jubilation and alienation - brought into relation on the obscure surfaces of speech. If light is cast on this scene, it is an illusory one, for when we imagine ourselves to be most informed about identity and meaning, we are actually locked within fantasy and childish narcissism. Lacan names narcissism's deceptive vision "heliocentrism".²¹ Thus with Lacan, just as in Burke, the image of visual clarity is simultaneously undercut by the presence of misrecognition and failed sight.

Psychoanalysis contained its own misrecognitions, however. Freud had jubilantly celebrated the enlightening discovery of the unconscious as a new Copernican revolution which would strip away the pretensions of the ego and the conscious mind in much the same way that Copernicus had revealed the earth travelled around the sun.²² But Lacan cautioned against a too easy identification with the "centre" that merely became "no more than the earth nodding its assent" to its own projected image.²³ Such identifications domesticated the

²⁰ For an account of the mirror-stage and its relation to the ideal ego, see "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the *I* as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience" in Lacan (1977), p. 2, and "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious" in Lacan (1977), pp. 306-7.

²¹ "Subversion of the Subject", Lacan (1977), p. 295.

²² See Freud, "A Difficulty on the Path of Psycho-Analysis", SE XVII, quoted by Elizabeth Grosz in *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 2.

²³ Lacan (1977), p. 295.

unconscious and led to the practice of ego-centred psychology. The subject was never a subject of absolute knowledge, because truth only appeared as the repressed of the system, its signifier always intervening "elsewhere". What religion named as the subject's ineffable moment of truth for Lacan was nothing other than a temporary upheaval in the orders of speech that ultimately served to displace presence, rather than revealing it. In this way, he argued that the subject was never the subject of revelation, being instead uncomfortably poised between an extinction "still glowing" and a "birth that is retarded".²⁴

Kristeva would by and large agree with the dangers of heliocentrism, but that did not prevent her in *Black Sun* from taking the figure of the sun as the governing trope for her text. In *Tales of Love* she maintained that all reflection reaches towards the solar source of light; her subsequent book illuminates the literally unthinkable nature of that light, for melancholia and depression acknowledge that at the heart of human experience lies an inconsolable grief over the perpetually estranged nature of existence. Separated from the wholeness we once belonged to, henceforth we will conduct our lives in the shadow of suffering and despair. If there is a place for ineffable experience here, like Lacan's imaginary jubilation it will be cast in anti-theological terms, which in *Black Sun* implies that the ecstatic moment is an *affect* following on the heels of a depressive or epileptic attack.²⁵ (*B S*: 177-184) In these terms, the discomfort and separation of estrangement are foundational; unmediated joy and the intimation of its other-worldly qualities are merely after-shocks registered through the body's signifying system.

Ecstasy, illumination, and a joy in the face of transcendent mysteries must therefore be modified in the light of radical materialism. Such a form of materialism does not privilege rationality, however, in assuming there is an Explanation for

²⁴ Lacan (1977), p. 300.

²⁵ See the following observation from Georges Bataille: "In practice the scrutinized sun can be identified with a mental ejaculation, foam on the lips, and an epileptic crisis." From his essay "Rotten Sun" in Allan Stoekl ed., *Georges Bataille: Visions of Excess. Selected Writings 1927-39*, trans. Allan Stoekl et als. (Oxford: Manchester University Press, 1985), p. 57.

everything. Rather, it accommodates mystery within the unreadable nature of affect and produces the ultimately unthinkable trope - a "dazzling obscurity"- that estrangement is. Neither completely exterior to discourse nor determined by it, the most intense forms of estrangement involve a confusion of boundaries. Visible or invisible? Inside me or outside? They disturb demarcations between interior and exterior space and unsettle the speaking subject in his customary dwelling-place. To write, to experience the time of dazzling obscurity, is to become a stranger to oneself and the familiar. At times exhilarating, at others encompassing a painful destitution of spirit, estrangement is a profoundly disquieting experience that turns the house of being upside down and presents its subject with new forms of speech and thought. Not that the renewal of language is easily acquired, for estrangement demands a consciousness of separation. Blanchot pronounces a severe judgement on the place of writing as one of dissatisfied exile shut out in the cold, and "the poet who belongs to it . . . [as] always lost to himself, outside, far from home; he belongs to the foreign, to the outside which knows no intimacy or limit".²⁶

There could not be more of a contrast to the time of exile or Kristeva's revolutionary poetics than a view which holds the ordinary with loving regard, or that looks towards an elsewhere without anxiety. For Bachelard, the nameless space of elsewhere that calls to the dreamer is not frightening or destructive but ultimately enlarging, because it allows him to redefine the protection offered by intimate space as one that both nurtures and permits movement away from its enclosure. In that way the dreamer may know the prospect of comfort in adversity: longing recognises the unhappy consciousness but does not have its permanent home there, constantly returning through dream to the places we know and love:

To illustrate the metaphysics of consciousness we should have to wait for the experiences during which being is cast out, that is to say,

²⁶ Blanchot (1982), p. 237.

thrown out, outside the being of the house, a circumstance in which the hostility of men and the universe accumulates. But a complete metaphysics, englobing both the conscious and the unconscious, would leave the privilege of its values within. Within the being, in the being of within, an enveloping warmth welcomes being . . . It is as though in this material paradise, the human being were bathed in nourishment . . .²⁷

Obviously, there are alternative narratives one could compose about the terrain of writing and its call to the subject. The tone of Bachelard's text differs markedly from Blanchot's; indeed I find it a refreshing change from what often appears to be a faddish mania for disavowing the pleasures of dwelling, an interpretive habit which our current social uncertainties have surely encouraged. Bachelard is no stranger to deprivation either though, and his passion for renewing the poetic image leads him to surrender the comforts of home for a journey marked by loss.

Common to all readings of estrangement and exile, then, is the notion of habitation and its interrogation: of the coupling of inside and outside, comfort and discomfort, resting and the journey. Deconstructing the mansion of presence and its oppositional forms, Jacques Derrida writes of voyages of creative and intellectual discovery as forms of positioning, rhetorical evasions in the face of an endlessly disseminated forest of significations. In which case Bachelard's comforting and upholding space would be a banal longing that in reality has lost its metaphysical "woof". Home as presence, even as presence going out of itself in daydream is an illusion, a pretence we maintain in the face of the failure of being and self-presence. One dwells thus only as through "expropriation" in a "borrowed dwelling . . . outside of the self in itself . . . This is the philosophical metaphor as a detour within (or in sight of) reappropriation, parousia [the second coming], the self-presence of the idea in its own light. The metaphorical trajectory [journey] from

²⁷ Bachelard (1969), p. 7.

the Platonic *eidos* to the Hegelian Idea."²⁸ The myth of self-presence is actually established through *différance*, a structured movement of deferral. There is no space outside the text, and no room for a moment without figure (or difference). Unwilling to relinquish the search for estrangement entirely though, Derrida redefines his own quest as to make "enigmatic what one thinks one understands by the words 'proximity,' 'immediacy,' 'presence'".²⁹ By folding the unknown over the spaces with which we are most familiar, grammatology elides the intimate spaces of habitation and the external places of exile, and by this means effects its critique of structure in general. Structure as architecture, structure as topography, structure as body: all metaphors that are grounded on the distinction between exterior and interior space will be dismantled. Conventional notions of Home and Place now mutually imbricated, lose their oppositional character and become unreadable inscriptions.

Yet were we to dismiss such a relentless critique of presence and inhabiting, we would have to concede that the question of strangeness *tout court* involves being cast out or called forth. It is a leaving, a distancing, a spacing. Saint Augustine knew the discourse of exile when he called the people of God to dwell in "no continuing city". The redeemed dwelling was always viewed from outside, from the place of exile: "For it is one thing," he writes, "to see the land of peace from a wooded ridge . . . and another to tread the road that leads to it."³⁰ All who actively engage with the creative processes of questioning, thinking and writing view the object of their goal as from a wooded ridge, that is, with longing from afar. It is difficult not to represent this viewing as part of a quest; a quest for knowledge, "truth", enlightenment - all of which may themselves be figures for a desire for the novelty of estrangement itself. But even though exile carries within its discourse the memory of a happier time when one was "at home" with

²⁸ "White Mythology" in Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 55.

²⁹ *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1976), p. 70.

³⁰ From the *Confessions*, VII, and quoted in C.S. Lewis (1955), p. 184.

oneself, or when it asserts a future time of reconciliation, thinking and writing about estrangement presuppose being conscious of loss and in exile from the beginning.

To think, one has to think already. (Blanchot said the same of writing.) Is exile the origin of writing and creative thought then? This opinion certainly seems to be widely held by intellectuals, and not only those who inhabit the late twentieth century. Disaffection and desire rather than a sense of quietude drive the quest for estrangement, which in turn may well be the universal symbolic form of which intellectual enterprise itself is but a particular variation. The nature of this disaffection and its journey of desire takes varied forms however. Speaking of the relation of inspiration to creativity, Blanchot mentions the example of Mallarmé whose sense of sterility and deprivation was a personal weakness and "did not signify that he was deprived of the work, but announced his encounter with the work, the threatening intimacy of this encounter."³¹ Writing in these post-Romantic terms is an enabling founded on weakness, where loss and leaving the comforts of home are the first steps towards true creativity. And creativity, of course, extends far beyond the familiar notion of the poet searching for his muse to encompass all forms of thought, including that of asking a question.

When Heidegger asks "what calls for thinking?",³² his response is to reflect on the usefulness of the word "call". He at once makes language *unfamiliar* to us by restoring to it apprehensions of meaning which habitual use had obscured, as well as insisting that such a return can only enable us to live more vitally within the house of Being that language is. He assumes, in other words, that the human need for shelter can be most satisfied by discovering the unexpected in the familiar, in itself a recognition that involves "leaving home". In the "Letter on Hu-

³¹ Blanchot (1982), p. 177.

³² "What Calls for Thinking?" in Heidegger (1978), pp. 345-367.

manism" he turns to the Greek Sophists, and tells the story of Heraclitus who was keeping himself warm by a stove one day when visited by a group of strangers. They were immediately chagrined to see the great philosopher engaged in such a humble ritual.³³ Seeing their consternation, he encourages them to come in saying, "For here too the gods are present." Thus mysteries are to be found in the commonplace, riches in the most humble of dwellings, and so does thought entertain angels unawares. Heidegger reads Heraclitus' observation, *ēthos anthrōpōi daimōn* as the opening out of the familiar to the unfamiliar: "'The (familiar) abode is for man the open region for the presencing of god (the unfamiliar one).'"³⁴

In this sense, thinking the strangeness of exile is something joyful, because the unexpected turns out to house that which one had most sought elsewhere. Thought, in calling us out of our habitual enclosures, brings "this advent of Being" to language and enriches our understanding of what the words "house" and "to dwell" mean. But if there is a sense of epiphany in Heidegger it is always articulated as a blinding obscurity, as a sign that "withdraws" in the face of our turning towards it.³⁵ The truth of Being is concealed, and presence eludes us in the same way that the original source recedes when we approach it. It would appear therefore that any form of reflection on being, on the nature of things, must inevitably ground itself in loss, in the consciousness of distance between observer and observed. In recognising this gap, Heidegger does not take the step that grammarology does, and collapse the subject of thought into its object. Exile may be interior to the subject of thought, but it is also an "exterior" that is approached through language as a refreshed kind of instrumentality. Nevertheless, it is true that for Heidegger too, authentic thought and existence ultimately submit to an unstoppable, anxiety-producing void.

³³ Heidegger (1978), "Letter on Humanism" pp. 193-242, especially pp. 233-4.

³⁴ Heidegger (1978), p. 234.

³⁵ "What Calls for Thinking?", Heidegger (1978), p. 351.

What strikes me as a more or less universal feature of philosophy's attempts to think the nature of being and habitation is the insistence on a subject who begins his venture by a yearning for otherness that is most often accompanied by distress, anxiety, angst. Heidegger terms such anxiety as being "ill at ease" ("*unheimlich*") in the face of Nothing.³⁶ The exile must forego the pleasures of settled domesticity if he is to elaborate the essence of man, because man's essence is intimately connected to Being, which is the Nothing. Thus the "more we turn toward beings in our preoccupations the less we let beings as a whole slip away as such and the more we turn away from the nothing."³⁷ Anxiety then, not only signifies we are facing in the right direction, it itself induces the "slipping away" of beings and of rootedness in the commonplace which imprisons perception in a succession of everyday trivialities. So it seems that a longing for elsewhere has the tendency to be accompanied by a turning away from the realities of this world. Heidegger's thinking man recognises the solitude and abandonment in which we find ourselves and from which we attempt to hide by sinking in an unreflective way into everyday existence. *Death is my eminent possibility*, and if I do not openly acknowledge death and finitude I cut myself off from Being and an authentic existence.³⁸ The space that Heidegger allows for a joy in the usefulness of objects and words and a recognition that one is bound to other persons through *solicitude*³⁹ saves his work from surrendering to a deadly abstraction, but it is nonetheless true that time and again one encounters in narratives of estrangement a sense of withdrawal, and a desire not for novelty as such, but for strangeness as death.

Indeed, Blanchot recounts the story of Orpheus' descent into the Underworld as culminating in an encounter with the night, the heart of all creation: "All the

³⁶ "What is Metaphysics?", Heidegger (1978), p. 103.

³⁷ "What is Metaphysics?", Heidegger (1978), p. 106.

³⁸ From H. J. Blackham, *Six Existentialist Thinkers* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961), p. 95.

³⁹ *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (London: SCM Press, 1962), pp. 157-162; pp. 237ff.

glory of his work, all the power of his art, and even the desire for a happy life in the lovely, clear light of day are sacrificed to this sole aim: to look in the night at what night hides, the *other* night, the dissimulation that appears."⁴⁰ Euridyce as a shade is the dissimulation that inspires Orpheus' song, her world that of the *negative* into which the poet gazes. Hegel similarly appears to valorise the look into darkness and the turning away from "mere existence" that produces truth out of "utter dismemberment": "Spirit is this power only by looking the negative in the face, and tarrying with it. This tarrying with the negative is the magical power that converts it into being."⁴¹ But there is probably no clearer illustration of the connection between estrangement and death than Freud's essay on the uncanny.⁴²

Freud begins by defining the uncanny as being related to what is frightening, "to what arouses dread and horror."⁴³ Rendered in German, uncanny is *unheimlich*, literally "unhomely". The uncanny is the quintessentially strange object because it is a horror of what was once familiar, and because within the etymology of the word *heimlich* or "homely" lies the suggestion that something is being concealed and kept out of sight. Paradoxically, *unheimlich* has been defined as "'the name for everything that ought to have remained . . . secret and hidden but has come to light."⁴⁴ Hélène Cixous describes *unheimlich(e)* as "the baroque forest of the dictionary",⁴⁵ the fecundity at the centre of the text that covertly animates the whole. Obscurity, masking an anxiety of Nature run riot, lies at the heart of clarity, and what was once hidden through repression has now been revealed. The most uncanny dread of all is the fear of being buried alive, which Freud links to the earlier experience of living in the mother's womb:

⁴⁰ Blanchot (1982), p. 172.

⁴¹ Hegel (1977), p. 19.

⁴² "The Uncanny", SE XVII, pp. 217-252.

⁴³ "The Uncanny", p. 219.

⁴⁴ "The Uncanny", p.226.

⁴⁵ Hélène Cixous, "Fiction and its Phantoms: a Reading of Freud's *Das Unheimliche* (the 'Uncanny')", *New Literary History*, Vol. 7, No. 3, (Spring 1976), p. 531.

There is a joke saying that "Love is homesickness"; and whenever a man dreams of a place or a country and says to himself, while he is still dreaming: "this place is familiar to me, I've been here before", we may interpret the place as being his mother's genitals or her body. In this case too, then, the *unheimlich* is what was once *heimisch*, familiar; the prefix "un" is the token of repression.⁴⁶

In fact, the mother's body turns out to be the prototypical site of uncanniness which "represents both home and not home, presence and absence, the promise of plenitude and the certainty of loss."⁴⁷ By this means what psychoanalysis took to be the pre-eminent founding moment brings into association estrangement, death, and the maternal body.

And it is precisely this disposition of death which Hélène Cixous critiques in "The Laugh of the Medusa".⁴⁸ Psychoanalysis has turned woman into "the uncanny stranger on display - the ailing or dead figure"⁴⁹ at the same time as it has repressed the creative drives in the unconscious. But because women have a privileged relation to the maternal body, Cixous argues they are closer to the drives and hence in a better position than men to affirm alterity, the term she calls "the wonder of being several".⁵⁰ Woman, she says, makes trouble for phallogocentric systems of meaning because she "resists death".⁵¹ Cixous appears happy to associate women with the strangeness of difference, but not death, loss, or separation. A feminine economy of representation is therefore apparently unstintingly giving, its writing a gift that does not give in order to give, but because giving is inherent to its nature. By contrast, masculine economics comprehends a "reductive stinginess" that cuts off libido and life. Since woman has

⁴⁶ "The Uncanny", p. 245.

⁴⁷ Madelon Sprengnether, *The Spectral Mother: Freud, Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 232.

⁴⁸ In Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron eds., *New French Feminisms: An Anthology* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1981), pp. 245-264. "The Laugh of the Medusa" first appeared in translation by Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen in *Signs*, (Summer 1976), a revised version of the first edition which was published in *L'arc*, (1975), pp. 39-54.

⁴⁹ Cixous (1981), p. 250.

⁵⁰ Cixous (1981), p. 260.

⁵¹ Cixous (1981), p. 246.

nothing to fear from castration, she cheerfully dislocates the orthopedic structures of thought by affirming *life*: like Molly Bloom, she says "yes" to writing.

In contrast to the deadly texts of Blanchot, Mallarmé and Hegel, a writing practice that affirms life assumes it can turn away from "the negative". More importantly, it assumes difference in general can be optimally represented as the *sexual* difference. Estrangement for Cixous lies not in pursuing an elusive Being in order to name it, but in being different names. Woman says "yes" to her multiple identities, and "yes" to a writing that defies exile. Undoubtedly, Cixous' quarrel here is not just with psychoanalysis, but with all forms of thought that confine woman to an oppositional signifier within man's discourse. Those conceptualisations that insist on deprivation for their founding moment, she believes, fail to take account of sexual difference as an unstinting process of exchange between and within subjects. And as we have seen, woman according to Cixous, is less afraid of facing up to difference, and more likely to give herself without counting. The (male) philosopher by contrast, fearing to accommodate difference within, but desiring the other sex all the same, takes his stand against the internal challenge of sexual difference in the form of a trembling Perseus or Orpheus, advancing backwards towards what he is most afraid of seeing.

Cixous has been variously claimed by critics for essentialism and anti-essentialism, since in many instances her writing is quite ambiguous on whether *l'écriture féminine* is linked in a special way with the biological female body or with feminine textuality.⁵² This particular distinction concerns me less here than the fact that her critique of "Lack" is a critique of the *Aufhebung* of philosophy

⁵² Madelon Sprengnether writes in illustration: "Thus, for instance, Alice Jardine describes Cixous as anti- or postfeminist due to the Derridean cast of her thought, while Ann Rosalind Jones regards her as obviously essentialist (*Gynesis* 20; 'Writing the Body' 366). Moi sees both strains at work in *La Jeune Née*. 'Fundamentally contradictory,' she writes, 'Cixous' theory of writing and femininity shifts back and forth from a Derridean emphasis on textuality as difference to a full-blown metaphysical account of writing as voice, presence and origin (*Sexual/Textual Politics* 119).'" These references cited in Sprengnether (1990), p. 202.

that sets man's anxiety and desire as the origin and end of writing.⁵³ Her essay *Sorties* accuses Hegel's theory of the dialectic in *Phenomenology of the Mind* as articulating an age-old feature of phallocentrism: the subject acquires knowledge of the other in order to confirm its mastery and its progress towards absolute knowledge. She terms this knowledge a product of the "Empire of the Selfsame" which appropriates and annuls alterity, producing a single history and reminding man that "death is his master."⁵⁴ And where the desire for death rules man, woman as alterity will be relegated to a shadowy place outside the time of history. Equally as symptomatic as their preoccupation with negativity and death, Mallarmé's "tragic dream" and, we could add, Blanchot's fascination for the pre-Oedipal Mother, and even Hegel's celebration of Antigone, reflect a way of thinking that proceeds by excluding sexual difference from history under cover of signifying universality. Woman cannot claim to be living in a home of her own, unlike Nietzsche, remarks Cixous, who prefigured his opening to *The Gay Science* with the "proud" words: "'The house I live in is my own,/I never copied anyone . . .'".⁵⁵ What if castration, separation and absence were not the be-all of thought, she asks? What if estrangement did not require dead, but living bodies?

Kristeva's response would be to insist on the foundational nature of separation, which all writing has to take account of. There are no "back rooms" for women to write in all on their own. Regarding responses like those of Cixous as representing a second-stage feminism that privileged woman's experience, she insists that we cannot acquire access to subjectivity unless there has been a radical separation from the mother. She would further add that there can be no writing as such that does not also recognise "the murder of soma", the inauguration of the incest taboo, and the repression of the drives in the unconscious. Kristeva is clear that the time of writing is the time of exile, and that the language of exile addressed

⁵³ Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 65.

⁵⁴ Cixous in Cixous and Clément (1986), p. 79.

⁵⁵ Cixous in Cixous and Clément (1986), p. 68.

from the edge of the void is often unbearable for humans to contemplate, revealing a landscape of "broken forms", "blanks" and darkness. Unlike Cixous, she frequently links death with the maternal body and the inexpressible pleasure of "jouissance".⁵⁶ Her work often gives the impression of being a fascinated contemplation of the abyss and an intense identification with loss. Her theory of semiotics sternly repudiates the notion of a privileged sexual identity, and even more tough-mindedly insists that a concern for others is an outdated form of anthropomorphism. Over and against Heidegger, in *Revolution in Poetic Language* she criticises his emphasis on "care" or solicitousness for others as belonging "to a mere medical ethic that has a kind of patching-up or first-aid function . . . anxiety and social work." (RPL: 129)

With the passing of time however, such a relentless embrace of the negative has been mitigated by an emphasis on the loving ear of the analyst as other, assisting subjects in need of care to have the burden of their suffering lifted, self-love, alleviating the plight of exiles and immigrants in Western countries, and writing the semi-phenomenological discourse of personal narrative into her theoretical texts. Throughout her writing career, Kristeva, unlike many other contemporary male theorists, has attempted to privilege a modality that is explicitly feminine with and through pursuing an ambitious ("exorbitant") quest to estrange contemporary thought and language. The notion of the maternal semiotic was first given a history in the early seventies in *Revolution in Poetic Language*, although it was more hypothetical and abstract, and therefore not as intimately linked to the signifiable female body as Cixous' *l'écriture féminine* (woman according to Cixous writes in "white ink"). There were attempts even from that time to discuss the maternal as the site of sexual pleasure as well as interdiction, and to address the question of the role of the female intellectual. Both of these issues presuppose a certain degree of *ambiguity* in relation to separation, loss and

⁵⁶ While it would be incorrect to suggest that Cixous ignores the work of separation and death, when she does deal with it, it is as a deadly struggle. See *Angst*, trans. Jo Levy (London: John Calder, 1985).

absence which immediately distinguished her work from her male contemporaries and feminists like Cixous. To an extent, she differed from conventional criticism in her understanding of the relation between body and text. Her increasingly personal investments in the text ran counter to philosophy's insistence on a neutral subject of enunciation, for when writing becomes more embodied, its relationship to narratives of separation and estrangement is a problematic one. By the same token, Kristeva did not support a privileged female form of representation. This led her to offer only an oblique support for feminism. So her difference from other women on this question is as intriguing as the rather more subtle distinctions she draws between herself and intellectuals who were men - or at least as she distinguishes herself from the unproblematised discourse of philosophy. But by and large it was not until her work took on a more psychoanalytical cast that the representation of death, desire, and identity became more complex. Some critics have observed that this difference of emphasis was a gradual progression which culminated in *Powers of Horror* or *Tales of Love*⁵⁷; I would probably locate the consistent presence of self-inflexion from the publication of "*Stabat Mater*" in 1976 after the birth of her son. From this point on, a personal enunciation is more apparent in the text, along with a marked interest in the transformation of subjectivity through the interchange effected between analyst and analysand. There is in addition, a more explicit

⁵⁷ John Lechte in *Julia Kristeva* (London: Routledge, 1990), notes Kristeva's "deepening personal commitment to analytic practice" over time, p. 6; and Paul Smith in *Discerning the Subject*, (Minneapolis: Minnesota Press, 1988) comments on what he calls the "subjectivist impasse" into which Kristeva's work has increasingly fallen, particularly when it began to reify the semiotic as evidenced in *Powers of Horror*. Jacqueline Rose observes Kristeva's reversals from a celebration of the semiotic through a preoccupation with its obverse - abjection - to a search for a paternal ideal. See her "Julia Kristeva; Take Two" in *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (London: Verso, 1986), pp. 141-164. In a more critical spirit, Jennifer Stone names *Powers of Horror* as the text that shows Kristeva taking "leave of her feminist senses". See Stone's "The Horrors of Power: a Critique of Kristeva" in Francis Barker et al eds., *The Politics of Theory, Proceedings of the Essex Conference on the Sociology of Literature July 1982* (Colchester: University of Essex Press, 1983), pp. 38-48. Finally, Alice Jardine discerns three distinct modes of Kristevan interpretation, from semanalysis in the sixties, to the semiotic/symbolic distinction in the seventies, followed by a shift to psychoanalysis in the eighties. She considers that this last shift began in 1979 with the publication of *Folle vérité* [translated by Seán Hand in Toril Moi ed., *The Kristeva Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 216-237] where the "true-real" (*vréel*, a compound of "vrai", "réel" and "elle") came to stand for a feminine psychic space. Alice Jardine, "Opaque Texts and Transparent Contexts: the Political Difference of Julia Kristeva" in Nancy Miller ed., *The Poetics of Gender* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 96-115.

confrontation staged between the (feminine) body and questions of transcendence. There are times, as in earlier texts, when woman becomes the privileged locus for estrangement, but one still equally discovers conceptual structures that allow no single identity to settle in the place of "stranger". The most important difference from earlier writing, though, clearly lies in the thematising of aspects of psychic life, their relation to notions of "exteriority", and the self-diagnostic representation of her own case history.

Kristeva's most recent non-fictional text, to which I now wish to turn, is *Etrangers à nous-mêmes*,⁵⁸ where the question of the female analyst is of less importance than in *Powers of Horror* or *Tales of Love*, but where estrangement is similarly read from the "wooded ridge" of personal experience. One of the most striking of all Kristeva's personal and theoretical emphases has been the experience of estrangement. Her preoccupation with linguistic anomalies and borderline patients has been increasingly matched with relatively frequent allusions to personal alienation. Concluding her essay on Samuel Beckett, she envisages the most visceral of responses as coming from an intellectual who is marginal and dispossessed, commenting: "Such a text necessarily attracts a certain number of admirers or even accomplices from among the 'others,' the 'dissimilar,' the strange, foreigners, and exiles." (*Desire*: 158) I think this sense of frustration and discomfort was not an isolated phenomenon, but something recurring that repeated itself in various forms in all her writing. Thus in *Etrangers à nous-mêmes* she gives the experience of estrangement as it assails fixed entities of space and time vivid (and abject) thematic life:

. . . a stranger inhabits us: it is the hidden face of our identity, the space that ruins our resting place, the moment where understanding and instinctive fellow feeling become swallowed up. Recognising the stranger within ourselves, we are spared from hating him in himself. A symptom which renders precisely the "we" problematic, perhaps

⁵⁸ Kristeva (Paris: Fayard, 1988). Translated as *Strangers to Ourselves* by Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991). In 1989 Kristeva was awarded the Prix Henri Hertz for *Etrangers*.

impossible, the stranger begins when the awareness of my difference arises and reaches its completion when we acknowledge ourselves all to be strangers, rebels from ties and communities. (*Etrangers*: 9)

Estrangement as an experience of abjection appears light years away from Proust's ecstatic memories of Venice, or Hegel's sunburst, for that matter. The stranger according to Kristeva is neither reconciled to the Same through the activity of the consciousness nor able to face personal depletion through a salvific experience with Art. What does enable him she argues, is the possibility that in recognising and loving his own alterity, in accepting that there is never a fixed dwelling or "chez soi", he may come to accept the strangeness of others. The sole support that enables us to live with strangers is knowing that we are strangers to ourselves. (*Etrangers*: 250) We can only respect incompatible differences within communities if we confront the fact that we are split subjects: desiring and desirable, mortal and death-bearing [*mortifières*], (*Etrangers*: 269) subject to the Law, but by the same token to abjection: lining of the Law and its disavowal.

The intensity of the problem of the stranger stems, Kristeva believes, from *within* a crisis of Western religion, and not primarily from the historical presence of the post-colonial other in the First World: "one becomes a stranger in another country because one is already a stranger within". (*Etrangers*: 26) Yet this space clearly derives in part from external realities: the emergence of post-colonial narratives, a personal identification with the state of exile, for example, and has been projected on to centre stage because of them.⁵⁹ Current events notwithstanding, the problem we face today can be attributed, Kristeva believes, to a failure of a term strong enough to accommodate difference without

⁵⁹ Speaking of the "autobiographical" nature of *Etrangers à nous-mêmes*, John Lechte is cautious in attributing too much of the text's investment (and origins) to personal experience: "It is, however, not so much that Kristeva is an exile and herself a foreigner, and that *therefore* she comes to develop a theoretical perspective beyond the familiar and the same, but that in the act of theorizing foreign-ness in its various forms, she at the same time constitutes herself as a subject formed (like all of us) through foreignness." Lechte (1990), p. 84. My view is less insistent on the prioritising of "theorizing foreign-ness" and more accommodating to the way autobiography and a representation of the personal insinuate themselves in the text "all the same".

becoming oppressive. In the past, religious and ethical sanctions to be found in Stoicism, Judaism, Christianity and humanism until the time of the Enlightenment afforded a certain number of safeguards, albeit weak and imperfect, that made some provision for the outsider. These discourses each managed to mitigate or veil the universal suspicion which greeted those outside the privileged group. The modern world lacks these safeguards unfortunately, because any sense of collective or transcendent values have collapsed, and yet we are at the same time being pushed closer together through more extensive political and economic ties. How then can we learn to live together without wishing to retreat into subjectivism or self-preserving nationhood on the one hand and a levelling kind of universalism on the other? How can we live as strangers today without becoming permanently locked in abjection?

Paradoxically, the necessity to discover a discourse or discourses that will sustain the imperative for some kind of corporate life is to be discovered within an analysis that investigates the degree to which all of us have made an *imperfect transition* to the world of collectively shared norms and values. For the experience of strangeness is, like abjection, the sign of incomplete separation from our first home - the mother's body - where the drives do not remain housed securely in the unconscious, but return in estranging bodily symptoms and affects. Metaphors of indigestion and incomplete introjection dominate this borderline condition: the stranger feels an "unappeased hunger", (*Etrangers*: 37) "a burning taste" (*Etrangers*: 12) and a "strangled rage at the back of. . .his throat". (*Etrangers*: 9) Ambivalence founds his social relations, for while being a stranger to his mother and to the land of his birth, a "cold orphan" whose only passion is "an insipid rapture" (*Etrangers*: 15) in the face of death, underneath this indifferent carapace lies a "flayed animal", (*Etrangers*: 25) a fanatic attachment to all receding points and goals, and a jouissance which prompts a return to the aggressivity of the drives. Bearing hatred and antagonism towards himself and others, which is the most primitive reaction to the outside world a body can display according to

Freud,⁶⁰ the stranger's sense of ego is precarious, and at times prompts him to make a direct identification with the Other (the Law), becoming either paranoid or psychotic.

This is the hidden face of alterity experienced directly on the outsider's body. What surfaces as the most common public objection to strangeness however, is that the person out of step with himself and society makes those who are less conscious of exile embarrassed and hostile, because the stranger reminds them that the glue of social relations maintains their lives in triviality, preserving an obliviousness to the banal. The trivial veiled from itself throws the identity of the stranger into relief as someone *external* to social normality, and thus assists in disavowing his surreptitious presence *within*. For what could be more disturbing to comforting routines than a voice which when it is not obsequious and ingratiating, unashamedly dissects them: "Those who have never lost the least anchor seem to you to be unable to hear a single word capable of relativising their point of view." (*Etrangers*: 30) Because the experience of radical uprooting is the lot of the exile, he is most often found as an ironist, relativising all points of view, and at home with no one in particular.

To summarise, the condition of estrangement as it is diagnosed here by Kristeva shares in common with other texts a desire to distance itself from the mundane world of the everyday, a fascination with death and absence, an insistence on the individual as a subject never in complete control of his speech whose ironic reflections leave him "homeless"; and finally, a refusal to believe that utopias and epiphanies are ever realisable or recognisable on earth. What makes the condition somewhat different from a number of the narratives examined earlier in the chapter is firstly its explicit debt to psychoanalysis, and secondly its oblique relation to "personal experience". As far as Kristeva is concerned, strangeness makes the phenomenological world uncertain; it renders the "I" of personal experience

⁶⁰ *Papers on Metapsychology*, SE XIV, p. 139.

problematic, rather than eliminating it altogether. Strangeness is a borderline condition that *complexifies* the representation of identity. In fact, the "I" is born in the same dazzling obscurity that founds signification in general. This is what I take to be the most compelling emphasis of Kristevan discourse: its dialogue on the question of estrangement with a subject whose enunciations always speak *from a distance*, and the implications of this dialogue for a female intellectual. For despite the uncertainty of identity produced by strangeness, Kristeva is determined to claim a place of privilege for her own speech as a woman and an analyst. In order to inflect generalised discourses on semiotics and psychoanalysis with a feminine particularity, she plays a nuanced and self-implicating game with language. Taking on the persona of the female voyager, she affirms that the subject-in-process *needs* the wisdom of the former in order to acknowledge that speculative thought and the encounter with transcendence has always been grounded in the world of *seeming*. Kristeva is there to seriously remind us, but also with feminine playfulness, not to take our games too seriously.

1. 2. The female voyager

Autobiography or autobiographical questions can therefore serve as the pretext for a reflection on the ephemeral nature of any speaking position. But Kristeva also seems to believe that a woman's voice may paradoxically be in a better position to articulate this transitoriness. One of the opportunities in *Etrangers à nous-mêmes* for exploring the nature of enunciation ("Who is speaking?") is the discussion of Nabokov's *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*. While the latter text purports to be semi-autobiographical, with the intrusion into the narrative of details that seem to closely resemble the life story of Nabokov himself, Kristeva is at pains to demonstrate that *Sebastian Knight* is definitely not a biography, but a reflection on its own writing. All attempts to make it recognisably biographical would twist it out of all recognition (would estrange it, perhaps?) The fact remains, however, that as readers we will probably construct a biography or an

autobiography all the same, pushing and shaping the text with "tender aggression" to fit our own projected image of the writer. But if the world is as Kristeva believes, closer to an enigmatic maze of traces than a continuity, our task to reconstruct an identity for Nabokov is ultimately fruitless. Under these circumstances, all writing can do is to link and unlink pieces of the puzzle that the subject *is*. In the end, argues Kristeva, it is language and not identity that bears the brunt of recollection, playing with the phonic and semantic textures of the signifier until memory, the origin of autobiography, is nothing but hyperbole. Transcendence and authorship are but accretions of language.

Naturally, there is another side to our story, as the reader comes to see that autobiography is less obliterated than simply displaced. Only the most intransigent of readers would not concede that *Etrangers à nous-mêmes* is replete with ironic autobiographical echoes: surely there must be a writerly pleasure in bringing to the reader's attention the story of Knight's encounter with the Cambridge professor when he pretended to be a Bulgarian from Sofia!⁶¹ And the felicitous pun of *écorcher* which means both to mispronounce and to flay the skin must have considerable resonance for Kristeva herself. Thus "identity" and "place" are present in writing, and although perhaps dependent on the reader's "tender aggression" to bring them to light, insist on being *read*. Exile tears us away from "the maternal bond", pulverises thought and produces a self-conscious *style*. But I cannot emphasise enough that writing need not end in permanent exile. Blanchot's writer inhabits a dark and lonely place. Kristeva's preoccupation with exile places her alongside Blanchot, but her particular form of self-consciousness immediately distinguishes them. For a certain degree of playful ambiguity over the act of separation ("did it occur, or didn't it?") imparts a thickened texture to

⁶¹ In "Say Nothing", Kristeva makes the following pertinent revelation: "Let me suppose that the fact of speaking a foreign language, being exiled within language, is perhaps not alien to the interest that *I* bring to this particular case of the eclipsing of representation. I could say, in paraphrasing Nabokov's famous novelistic character of Sebastian Knight: 'I was a bleak woman who spoke a broken French. I am a broken woman who speaks a bleak French . . .'. Originally published in *Tel Quel*, No. 91, (Spring 1982), and translated by Salvatore Mele for *On the Beach*, No's. 3/4, (Summer/Autumn 1984), pp. 10-14. This reference, p. 11.

language. Style, through the register of irony, connects us up "once again" to the object of displacement (woman, "personal affect", and so on).

A final observation: doesn't the expression "tender aggression" suggest a certain degree of abjection? In *Powers of Horror* we are informed that abjection as a borderline state undergone before achieving a sense of separate identity is characterised by "ambiguous opposition". (*Powers*: 7) Neither one thing nor the other, it only recognises what elsewhere would be an impossible contradiction. Thus if reading comprehends abjection which in turn borders on the state of exile, then whose is the most authoritative projection on the subject: the reader's or the writer's? The reading process, like love perhaps, clouds the issue, obscuring distinctions between "inside" and "outside", "me" and "you", "homely" and "unhomely". I will return to this dilemma in the following section, but for the meantime I will suggest that both identity and its dissolution are necessary functions when we read a text, and not least when that text happens to be by a female intellectual who practises psychoanalysis.

In the spring of 1974, Kristeva published a short piece in *Promesse* entitled "D'Ithaca à New York", in which she observes the condition of post-modernity as it is registered in a highly urban society. She offers the figure of the female voyager as the exemplary role to assume in the face of New York's frenetic movement. The time of New York is one of rupture, of perpetual comings and goings which the female voyager can turn into a play that avoids all notions of fixity. In place of Penelope who waits for Ulysses at home, the "ruse of the female voyager . . . lies in not having a 'chez-soi,' in considering every home a place . . . of the Other, and irritated by its fixity, refusing it".⁶² The woman who is able to travel through countries, discourses, and texts, occupies a privileged place because she refuses to domesticate the structures that surround her. To her, every potential home becomes an estranging place, offering a site of dissolving identities and

⁶² "D'Ithaca à New York", first published in *Promesse*, No.'s 36-6, (Spring 1974); republished in *Polylogue* (Paris: Seuil, 1977), pp. 495-515. This reference, p. 495.

structures in motion. If, like Penelope, woman's habitual task has been to transform the places of waiting into comforting homes, Kristeva's ideal woman will turn the waiting game on its head by making the familiar into something strange. Her facility for playful masquerade, we infer, will keep this female voyager from playing the role of the traveller who like Ulysses travels in order to master, because only woman knows that crossing the seas is just a game, and not for real.

And "the real" is precisely the problem, because this society poised on the brink of aphasia according to Kristeva, has more or less eliminated the power of the imagination from its cultural memory. It even takes its dreams too seriously. Buildings, huge cubes of glass, steel and neon are Mallarmé's "Un coup de dés" *literalised*, made real.⁶³ In this place that has conspired to make imagination and dreams a reality, "everything is free, but nothing is possible." ("DINY": 498) Such a system fails to allow for any sense of renewal and transformation by the Other, and there can be no imaginary epiphanies where consumer capitalism and popular culture guarantee to animate every fantasy and illuminate every dark and inexplicable corner of our dreams with the infinitely variable marketable commodity. Consequently the superego (the Law, the Other) becomes crushing because the subject identifies with the real, and so exposes himself to the Law's full weight without allowing for a more habitable symbolic mediated by the work of the imaginary. New York, Kristeva claims, *needs* the female voyager's imagination. Gazing up at those towers of black glass that distort one's image, returning it shattered into fragments and blocks, one can only agree that the experience has a disturbing effect resembling the return of the repressed.

Inhabiting this strange world is the American family: "Come back and bring the family" is the kind of fake homeliness that draws the domestic world of Mom, Dad and kids into the more questionable sensory and erotic pleasures afforded by

⁶³ With Mallarmé, one literally becomes the die: "the body becomes a 'calm block here-below fallen from an obscure disaster' (Mallarmé)", in *RPL*, p. 132.

New York. Contemporary American culture according to Kristeva is deprived of the "Verb" - only "the id speaks" - and genuine, imaginative analysis that moves between one and the other is lacking. Other critics have taken up the ethnocentricity and arrogance of such remarks,⁶⁴ but what interests me more here is the pretext this assumption provides for speaking about the role of women. The community of women, she argues, is a community of hysterics ("DINY": 510) because the American feminist's rather simplistic opposition of body and drive on the one hand and verbalisation on the other resembles the difficulty of hysteria, a condition whose sufferers deny the final exile in the symbolic. Hysterics find the constraints of the symbolic too confining, and discover ways to return to the comfort of the drive-governed body. Alternatively, feminists have adopted (again, like hysterics) an aggressive masculine style and discourse by fighting for political equality or reviving the utopic dream of matriarchy. In either case, the ultimate end is a static situation that allows women to feel too much at home with either the political system or the maternal body. Perhaps, Kristeva suggests, the American woman even wishes to abolish the coded discourse of love and romance and replace it with an "aphasic jouissance", which would turn males into "dumb troubadors" ready to serve in their own dismemberment. Better still, women in America today may well be in the process of abolishing love altogether. The female voyager by comparison, is in a privileged place to avoid a complicity with the forces of planned obsolescence which prompts feminists to destroy all truth and make men redundant. Her constant moving from place to place that enables her to view everything as "strange" may actually help her to mediate more productively the relation between body and language. Accordingly, she must keep the subjective unity of the "I" in a productive tension with the strangeness of maternal rhythm.

In practice, it is not clear precisely what would follow from such a generalisation, and its theoretical symmetry leads the reader to wonder if Kristeva's own dis-

⁶⁴ See, for instance, Toril Moi's introductory comments on pp. 272-3 to the essay "Why the United States?" in Toril Moi ed., *The Kristeva Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

course in relation to feminism does not exercise a too easily-won form of mastery. Just how far she has travelled from what a certain form of feminist criticism would call "home" is to be seen in the following essay by Minnie Bruce Pratt entitled "Identity: Skin Blood Heart". Here Pratt painstakingly explores the notion of home that she is now seeking to put into place in her own life.⁶⁵ Separated from her two children and a privileged white middle-class past through becoming a lesbian, she attempts to understand some of the narratives that have shaped her sense of home and settled-ness in the context of her new life in a poor black area of Washington DC. Her search is the equivalent of a laboured coming to consciousness of the material advantages with which she had been surrounded, "stripping away layer after layer of . . . false identity, notions of skin, blood, heart based in racism and anti-Semitism . . .".⁶⁶ Not that Pratt is insisting that identity be monolithic, but she is making the assumption that underneath the superficial unenlightened self lies a truer one, which if liberated will make the world into a better place. The possibility of challenging the placid assumptions of home is acknowledged, but the Kristevan exuberance in *never* making a home would be quite lost with Pratt. An upheaval in the house for Pratt must result in social and political action, and she would have little patience with Kristeva's call for a renewed aesthetic (imaginary) practice.⁶⁷

More recently, also using the rhetoric of personal history but again at odds with Kristeva, Nancy Miller presented a paper on the question of location and female subjectivity dedicated to "Mary Ann Caws and Jane Tompkins, who lured me

⁶⁵ In Elly Bulkin, Minnie Bruce Pratt and Barbara Smith eds, *Yours in Struggle: Three Feminist Perspectives on Anti-Semitism and Racism* (Brooklyn: Long Haul Press, 1984), pp. 11-63.

⁶⁶ Bulkin et al eds. (1984), p. 43.

⁶⁷ Pratt's essay has been reclaimed for a more theoretically aware feminist practice by Biddy Martin and Chandra Talpade Mohanty. They claim that her narrative is actually fractured and multipositional rather than authoritative, there being "an irreconcilable tension between . . . [Pratt's] search for a secure place from which to speak, within which to act, and the awareness of the price at which secure places are bought, the awareness of the exclusions, the denials, the blindnesses on which they are predicated." "Feminist Politics: What's Home Got to do With It?", in Teresa de Lauretis ed., *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 206. Nonetheless we can sense that Pratt is still involved in articulating a politics of place that privileges a community working for explicit social and political change.

into the dangerous waters of personal criticism."⁶⁸ "I am working toward a more self-consciously political and personal feminist poetics", writes Miller. In this paper through a variety of voices and positions, she reflects on the implications for feminist theory of problematising its use of the "we" when variables such as class and race are permitted to intersect with the more familiar issue of gender. Miller opens her chapter of dreams with Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and closes with an analysis of the dreams of Jewish and Arab children in Israel and the West Bank.⁶⁹ In between and as a post-script, we are given a variety of autobiographical information including a confession of Miller's Jewish middle-classness, and how she has recently turned away from years of academic privilege to take up a job teaching at a college in the Bronx (for which she provides handy directions for the non street-wise by subway, bus and car). The dream of feminist criticism according to Miller should entail "textual knowledge of the culture of another country, even if they don't know how to get there",⁷⁰ and should grow out of a recognition that "The Personal is the Positional/The Positional is the Political".⁷¹

After long being the doyenne of a feminist-inflected Barthesian criticism, to explore the personal in such intimate terms clearly was a heady but risky enterprise for Miller. For even as exploring the personal affects of reading and writing as a woman led to a new focus, it also threatened what seemed a dead-end: narcissism. Privileging women's subjectivity as Pratt and Miller do risks petrifying it in a specular image, which is precisely the problem Kristeva seeks to avoid in the complex and nuanced representation of her own personal history. In the long run, the confessional or autobiographical mode may be no more productive for female intellectuals than any other genre of writing. Often when

⁶⁸ "Dreaming, Dancing, and the Changing Locations of Feminist Criticism", an in-process paper given to the 1988 Summer School of Criticism and Theory at Dartmouth (pp. 1-33).

⁶⁹ Miller's source here is from David Grossman's book *Yellow Wind*, first published in excerpt form in the *New Yorker*, Feb. 8, 1988.

⁷⁰ Miller (1988), p. 17

⁷¹ Miller (1988), p. 25.

women have made use of these self-conscious forms of representation, they have foreshortened the reach of their criticism. Life-stories tend to take up *all* the room, and eliminate careful development of intellectual ideas. When criticism becomes frozen in a mode of writing that reifies the female voice, it loses its savour and tends to become smug and inward looking. "Body" overwhelms and devours "text".⁷² For where the language of criticism and analysis fails to mediate between the text/body dialectic, we find reproduced exactly the same kind of strangely oppressive place Kristeva found in New York. Deprived of all sense of perspective, the subject is literally crushed beneath the weight of a hostile textual body, a massive, overpowering landscape that allows no room for difference - and thus for the *necessary psychic space* that distinguishes one subject from another. Thus the question of narcissism is a primary structuring one for female intellectuals, who may literally find themselves stranded on the border between a feminine narcissistic focus on the self and the self's objects of love on the one hand, and an effacing of self and identity in writing on the other.

Nancy Miller is one feminist critic among many who confronts the Barthesian injunction that "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" and his question, "What matters who reads?", with caution. Her critical essay "Changing the Subject" does not warm to Barthes' predilection for death, and I include part of her quotation from the preface of *Sade/Fourier/Layola* (1971):

For if through a twisted dialectic, the Text, destroyer of all subject [sic], contains a subject to love . . . that subject is dispersed, somewhat like the ashes we strew into the wind after death . . . Were I a writer, and dead how I would love it if my life, through the pains of some

⁷² Elaine Showalter writes of the need to develop "theories of women's writing, theories proved on our pulses." See her "Critical Cross-Dressing: Male Feminists and the Woman of the Year", in Alice Jardine and Paul Smith eds., *Men in Feminism* (New York: Methuen, 1987), p. 130. Barthes by contrast comments how "once communication is effective . . . banality becomes the heaviest of the threats which weigh upon it." *Barthes: Critical Essays*, trans. Richard Howard (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), p. xvi.

friendly and detached biographer, were to reduce itself to a few details, a few preferences, a few inflections . . .⁷³.

Loves for Barthes implies death and dispersion, but does it for the woman, Miller asks, if the female subject has *historically* been dispersed and rendered invisible (dead)? Surely this ought to imply that woman has a "structurally different" relation to agency, textuality and desire than Barthes' universal man who does not recognise woman's particular discourse. "What does it mean," Miller continues, "to read and write as a woman within the institution that authorizes and regulates most reading and writing?"⁷⁴ Miller wishes to preserve a sense of female integrity and intentionality in the text but finally settles for the mode of irony: a "certain distance to the truth"⁷⁵ as a means of securing difference within the constraints of textuality and the semiotics of its "performance and production."⁷⁶ Language, then, will provide the female intellectual with a necessary sense of ambiguity and excess which is less related to a violent disintegration than an ability to manipulate structures, positions, voices. Such a reading celebrates women's liberation without turning the field of language into "a few preferences".⁷⁷

⁷³ "Changing the Subject: Authorship, Writing, and the Reader" in de Lauretis ed. (1986), pp. 105-6. Miller here cites from Barthes' *Sade/Fourier/Loyola*, translated by Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976), pp. 8-9. Barthes' sentiments delivered with reticence are reminiscent of those of Michel Foucault in "The Discourse on Language", published as an appendix to *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972), p. 215, where he speaks of his desire to slip "imperceptibly into this lecture". To be "freed from the obligation to begin" is commensurate in many respects with Barthes' autobiographical fragments.

⁷⁴ Miller in de Lauretis ed. (1986), p. 112.

⁷⁵ Miller in de Lauretis ed. (1986), p. 114.

⁷⁶ Miller in de Lauretis ed. (1986), p. 114.

⁷⁷ Teresa de Lauretis is another feminist who would insist on the problematic nature of gender, regarding it as at once a representation (of desire and agency) and representations' excess; or expressed another way, as the product *and* process of representation. Since de Lauretis regards psychoanalysis as using male analytic categories to account for female psychosocial development, her enthusiasm for what lies "elsewhere" is underwritten by the need to discover new ways of naming "woman". She makes use of the "space-off" in film theory to locate an alterity to conventional representation that is "not represented yet implied (unseen) in them." See her *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 26 and *passim*.

Miller would not, I feel, support Kristeva's fascination with the fading of the subject of enunciation. (As early as 1966, Kristeva had read the author as "an anonymity, an absence", his writing founded on the gap that opens within the subject between the *énoncé* [what is spoken] and the *énonciation* [the act of speaking]).⁷⁸ But for my part, the sense of loss of identity and facelessness alluded to can on occasions, despite feminist critique, be seductive. In fact, there are times when feminism's emphasis on materiality and the female body becomes a burden for research. If it has given us a more complex understanding of the relationship between the coupling of mind and body in philosophical discourse, and an awareness of the tremendous cost to human experience in repressing the latter term, it has also resulted in a tendency towards a new prescriptivism for those intellectuals who are women: "*real* women theorise gender and the female body". Kristeva's stubborn distance from this form of judgement is one aspect of her work that I find refreshing. So to return to her work, precisely what place does the signifier "woman" occupy? What might its relationship be to questions of exile and epiphany? To the distinction between home and place? Does it ground and inform these questions, or does it sit awkwardly in the text as an afterthought, an embarrassing irrelevance? Further, is it at all helpful to align Kristeva's thought with other explicitly feminist texts? What kind of regard does she have for a category as gendered as the female intellectual? Is it possible to discover the answer to these questions with any certainty?

At this point I would stress that the term "female intellectual" and not "feminist" has been chosen to engage in dialogue with Kristeva's texts, and with the broader question of estrangement. My commitments are not always to feminism as an ideology, or as a consistent way of reading, for that matter, but to exploring the question of thinking as a woman. If there comes a time when that particular expression is found to be an anachronism or a hindrance to reading,

⁷⁸ See *Desire*, pp. 64-91.

then I shall set it to one side and attempt to search for a discourse that is more able to privilege shared values across the gender divide, or that internalises sexual difference within each subject. Intellectual inquiry must maintain itself as a country where nothing is forbidden; where no areas are off limits by virtue of one's race, gender, or class. To charge the female intellectual with *always* thinking as a woman seems to me by a strange sleight of hand to return thought and its subjects to an age where access to education was determined according to one's gender, and where women in particular were denied access to participation as equals in the intellectual world. That aspects of feminist theory are currently instrumental in provoking a radical re-orientation of much critical inquiry does not lessen my concern, especially where the other (the "patriarchy") is still represented in paranoid fashion as the enemy on the outside. What Kristeva's reading of strangeness has to offer here, I feel, is its urgent plea that both men and women recognise the strangeness which lives within (as sexual difference, for instance). In that way there can be no other in permanent opposition; simply divided subjects willing to make temporary allegiances, whose only genuine universal is to be found in the mysterious immediacy of language itself, invested with and transformed by affect. The place of the female intellectual therefore, should be one from which gender is both posited and dissolved.

I suspect that Kristeva's thinking about women who make self-reflexive thought their calling is complex and at times contradictory. On occasions the question preoccupies her, on others its insistence is minimal. In the former case she appears to privilege with one hand and take away with the other; in the latter I hear for a moment the ironic "autobiographical" voice of the female voyager who knows that there are at least some advantages in being a woman and an intellectual. Either way, it is probably inevitable that sexual difference turns aside from the kind of illumination that would discover and name a totality (of identity or

theory) and when its elusive nature is imbricated with a "music in letters", what remains is not exactly a woman but a painting, as Matisse once said.⁷⁹

Admittedly, there are moments when Kristeva's enraptured writing on the *jouissance* associated with the nameless leads me to suspect that like Beckett's characters in "First Love" and "Mouth", she is too preoccupied with obsessional ruminations on loss and death. But clearly this is not all there is. In some texts, the reader has a much clearer sense that sexual difference must still be discussed in terms of symbolic identity. Indeed, those who accuse Kristeva of an out and out hostility to women have obviously not read "D'Ithaca à New York". In the midst of her rather patronising dismissal of American feminism, there suddenly occurs an astonishing outburst against (academic) men. The trouble with these "senile" male intellectuals (or "pimps"!) is that they are either full of "inane gallantry or libidinous paternalism", their avaricious desires fading as soon as the female intellectual begins to speak. They fantasise that the intelligent woman is a phallic mother and, fearful of coming too close, idealise beauty instead. If they do see a woman's body standing there they either can't concentrate on what she's saying or devalue it, and in a "homosexual purist passion" strive to "disencumber the theoretical field" of her presence. ("DINY": 513) Surely, an observation which has considerable affinity with Cixous' objections to the male philosopher whose quest for knowledge permits woman to be mystery, but not to know it. In 1974 when this brief text was written, "beauty" is obviously regarded by Kristeva as one discourse that expels the maximum of alterity.⁸⁰ Beauty might be sublime, but has lost its capacity for revitalising the house of language. It is too *purist* to be able to transpose the language of the body (affect) into the text. Perhaps some enigmatic attribute of the "feminine" body might be able to stand in the same relation to meaning as transcendence once did - that is, as both

⁷⁹ ". . . je ne crée pas une femme, je fais un tableau", attributed to Matisse in Albert Skira ed., *Stéphane Mallarmé Poésies*, Illustrations de Henri Matisse (Paris: L.C.L./Gallimard, 1966), pagination not supplied.

⁸⁰ This particular dismissive reading of "beauty" receives its about turn in a much more recent reading in *BS*. See especially pp. 97-103, 206.

external to the system, but capable of transforming it from within. So Kristeva responds by privileging the notion of alterity and equating it with "maternal rhythm", which in turn implied that *women* might stand in a privileged relation to discourses that included the voices of others. A particular kind of identity or position, then, gave them this hold. What was it?

We need to examine carefully the reasoning that leads Kristeva, among others, to suggest that at times, women occupy a *different* place in relation to language and the body. Ellie Ragland-Sullivan explains feminine identity in the following way: even though the mother is not in reality a source of fullness and presence outside discourse, she does have a "closer perceptual proximity to the desire that cannot be separated from the corporeal".⁸¹ And further, "the mother is the natural signifier for desire, while the father's name offers a measure of distance, the mediation of language, as a phallic third term of flight, escape, or mastery, away from a profound source of affect." Women, because of their less precipitous flight away from the mother on the way to constructing their identity as gendered, Oedipal subjects, have generally been regarded as preserving a closer relation to the drives, to affect as rhythm, vocalisation, and so on. Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous both affirm this particular quality of feminine subjectivity, as in a more empiricist manner do object relations theorists such as Nancy Chodorow, Dorothy Dinnerstein, Jessica Benjamin and Melanie Klein.⁸² The instances where Kristeva herself maintains a belief, even a vested interest in the difficulty of achieving a female subjectivity are legion, and I would anticipate that

⁸¹ "Seeking the Third Term: Desire, the Phallus, and the Materiality of Language" in Richard Feldstein and Judith Roof eds., *Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1989), pp. 40-64. This reference, p. 56. Note also the point that "the primordial maternal phantasmal *objet a* serves as the material lining (*doublure*) of the subject which infers a structure (ordering) in being".

⁸² Consult, for instance, Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985); Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa" in Marks and de Courtivron eds. (1981), pp. 245-264; Jessica Benjamin, "The Decline of the Oedipus Complex" in John Broughton ed., *Critical Theories of Psychological Development* (New York: Plenum Press, 1987), pp. 211-244; Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); Dorothy Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976); Melanie Klein, *Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works* (New York: Dell, 1975).

many of these examples will offer themselves in later chapters. In the meantime, an example or two will suffice, the first from "Women's Time".⁸³ Here, Kristeva articulates the unique kind of temporalities that emerge when reproduction of sex, bodies and symbols is considered as a factor common to the experience of Europe and beyond. One of the reasons feminists have for claiming that identification among woman is distinctive rests on what Kristeva has expressed as "the connivance of the young girl with her mother, [and] her greater difficulty than the boy in detaching herself from the mother in order to accede to the order of signs as invested by the absence and separation constitutive of the paternal function." ("WT": 204) She notes that because the transition to the symbolic is so fraught, and because woman can never really, unlike the man, restore this maternal relationship to herself except through becoming a mother or through homosexuality, her fantasies about the "archaic mother" are almost inconsolable. She thus becomes something of a vulnerable subject, never quite recovering from the original loss of her mother, perhaps never fully accepting it even. Despite recognising these handicaps, in case we still persist in imagining that woman's position in the symbolic is identical to man's, we could turn to the following remark:

I think that for a woman, generally speaking, the loss of identity in jouissance demands of her that she experience the phallus that she simply is; but this phallus must immediately be established somewhere; in narcissism, for instance, in children, in a denial and/or hypostasis of the other woman, in a narrow-minded mastery, or in fetishism of one's "work". . . (*Desire*: 164)

Here, woman is in the position of the desired object (she *is* the phallus but cannot *have* it). Standing in the place of that first archaic object, she cannot herself be the phallic mother, but is obliged lest she fly too close to her old home, to anchor herself in the symbolic by maintaining a firm attachment to social, intellectual or political projects. Even this anchorage, however, is a good deal less certain than

⁸³ First published as "le temps des femmes" in 33/34: *Cahiers de recherche de sciences des textes et documents*, No. 5, (Winter 1979), pp. 5-19, translated by Alice Jardine and Harry Blake in *Moi* ed. (1986), pp. 188-213.

it is for a man, and the reader is left with the impression that woman can *never* feel as at home in the symbolic as can man. She becomes the "female exile":

A woman is trapped within the frontiers of her body and even of her species, and consequently always feels *exiled* both by the general clichés that make up a common consensus and by the very powers of generalization intrinsic to language. This female exile in relation to the General and to Meaning is such that a woman is always singular, to the point where she comes to represent the singularity of the singular - the fragmentation, the drive, the unnameable. ("ANT": 296)

Lest it be assumed that the above remarks imply that women are permanently exiled from the symbolic and more at home in the unconscious, we must turn again to the universal experience of separation. Undergone by all subjects, and crucially important for our emergence as speaking beings, is an experience of splitting, in effect a series of separations that tear us away from our first maternal support and assist us in becoming individuals, even if a fully stable identity is for each subject always a fiction. Birth, weaning, castration; these imaginary, symbolic and real processes of separation shape our subjectivity. Kristeva's work constantly reminds us that indifference to the phallus is simply wishful thinking. The doorway to speech for all subjects lies through leaving the family home and "cleaving" to an other. We speak from the place of what Paul Smith terms the "enunciatory abyss".⁸⁴ Castration and loss we can now see, found society and speech, their painful experiences reflecting a universal condition that takes in its stride, but is not reduced to, the passion for death, absence, broken forms, the *vide*. Matricide then appears as the crime that will save us all from immobility, asymbolia, psychosis. And if the process is begun but never fully completed we will encounter severe depression, self-contempt, hatred, even violence towards the others in our lives. But, strangely enough, Kristeva is in the next breath led to make the following remark:

⁸⁴ *Discerning the Subject* (Minneapolis; Minnesota Press, 1988), p. 102.

For a woman, whose specular identification with the mother as well as the introjection of the maternal body and self are more immediate, such an inversion of matricidal drive into a death-bearing maternal image is more difficult, *if not impossible* [my emphasis]. Indeed, how can She be that bloodthirsty Fury, since I am She (sexually and narcissistically), She is I? (BS: 28-9)

Is this an imaginary delusion, or a symbolic difference? The woman in these terms appears closer to melancholia than a man. Moreover, she is possibly better able to explore those discourses which found artistic and intellectual activity, if she is able to pull herself out of her narcissistic condition with the assistance of a strong idealising capacity. There is even a hint in this introductory chapter of *Black Sun* that the woman who does survive is indeed one of the "fittest", for if:

the discovery of her invisible vagina already imposes upon woman a tremendous sensory, speculative, and intellectual effort, shifting to the symbolic order *at the same time* as to a sexual object of a sex other than that of the primary maternal object represents a gigantic elaboration in which a woman cathezes a psychic potential greater than what is demanded of the male sex. (BS: 30)

It would seem that the creative potential at woman's disposal is indeed prodigious, and if a strong ideal is introjected at the same time as a woman reaches maturity, then the possibility of producing "sensory, speculative, and intellectual" works is highly likely. Surely a self-reflective remark guaranteed to draw attention to that very author's seemingly endless succession of highly theoretical texts! Such an inference is almost inescapable. These are moreover, speculative works that would affirm strangeness as a permanent mode of being. For woman's ambivalent relation to specular identification and the body has given her an edge over the male intellectual in articulating a new relation to exteriority. She is able, according to Kristeva, to both *reflect* on this exteriority and to stand in its place, her feminine relation to the body functioning as that exteriority's privileged home. In which case the capacity for renewal is neither entirely outside language, nor fully at home within it.

Some years ago in a paper entitled "A New Type of Intellectual: the Dissident", Kristeva had maintained that the fundamental role of the intellectual was to exist as a subject who constantly put structures and meanings in question. This kind of a perspective worked against the natural grain of institutionalised intellectual life to engender a discomfort with the notion of "home". Domesticated habits of thought included all those forms of analysis that engendered a common consensus and presupposed a fixed identity (author/critic; man/woman; meaning/non-meaning, for instance). By contrast, the intellectual in permanent dissent was exhorted to assume the language of exile as his most true, but also most evasive, home: "How can one avoid sinking into the mire of common sense, if not by becoming a stranger to one's own country, language, sex and identity? Writing is impossible without some kind of exile." ("ANT": 298) Alongside the assumption that thought requires an estrangement from sexual identity, we read, surprisingly, of the privileged place accorded to women. They too, it would seem, find the rigidity of totalising meaning frustrating, and their investment in maternity means that they are able to link "heterogeneous sites" in thought or creative acts. Now Kristeva in some senses at this point accepts Hegel's relegation of women to be care-takers of death and the law⁸⁵ because, she feels, they are "least afraid" of both. That is, women's role as mothers (preservers of life) gives them a place in the symbolic, but the fact that they have apparently less to fear from the Law (in other words, they are less afraid of castration), makes them potential advocates of a pluralising of meaning. Which in turn makes them possible candidates for the role of the intellectual as dissident. Here we have demonstrated for us that double movement characteristic of much of Kristeva's writing on women: on the one hand, a turning away from finding a special place for women; on the other a gesture that appears to reinstate the category of the female intellectual.

⁸⁵ See Hegel's comments on women and the family in Hegel, trans. Miller (1977), pp. 267 ff.

This movement introduces an unresolved contradiction in her texts, particularly the early work on semiotics where one can read whole stretches of writing that assume a universal, apparently placeless voice only occasionally interrupted by a more embodied voice acknowledging its debt to femininity. On the question of consistency, Luce Irigaray appears to have had more success because her critique of the enterprise of philosophy is so radical. Like Cixous, she would argue that philosophy is a house built by and for man; woman's only alternative is to imagine and write entirely new conceptual structures that would affirm the absolute and irreducible nature of sexual difference. Kristeva by contrast works for moments of privilege for women within the larger project of estranging being.

Undoubtedly, the biggest challenge to philosophy today is the enigmatic figure of the woman philosopher (the female intellectual). In agreement, Antoinin Artaud once wrote, ". . . like all women you think with your sex, not with your mind."⁸⁶ How can this exorbitant challenge to the status quo which instinctively would link woman with "sex" and not "mind" be dislodged? As I indicated, such a challenge is taken up in all Kristeva's research. If not explicitly, then from across the divide, the enunciatory abyss that separates "body" from "text", her writing is engaged with a supplementary project over and above its explicit aims, which is to work out a justification that would account for both "the sudden surge of women and children in discourse" ("ANT": 300) and the legitimacy of her own "personal" wager with language and thought.

But why then is it necessary for this supplementary project to be so oblique? Why have so many critics who have read Kristeva come away feeling she has little to say on the question of woman? I think there are four main factors at work which have produced a discourse that is either surreptitious, or in two

⁸⁶ Quoted by Michèle Montrelay, "Inquiry into Femininity", trans. Parveen Adams in Toril Moi ed., *French Feminist Thought: A Reader* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), p. 227.

minds, about female subjectivity.⁸⁷ The first is that she has up to a point accepted the anti-phenomenological terms of reference of much contemporary criticism. The empirical world of experience discovers that the text does not offer a homely reflection. The face that looks back at us from the surface of the text is blank or disfigured. When Kristeva speaks of her "experience" of exile in the essay "Polylogue", she does so in order to use its estranging effects as the objective correlative for a disintegrated subject: "Consequently, as you may have noticed, I have no 'I' anymore, no imaginary, if you wish; everything escapes or comes together in theory, or politics, or activism." (*Desire*: 161) The exile cannot claim to have a settled identity, nor can she ever be fully at home with her sex, and when she is deprived of an imaginary, she lacks the ability to put together a coherent narrative in which she could see herself and in which she could be seen. Secondly, as we have already observed, if the Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytical narrative is accepted with its different *rites de passage* for males and females, woman *does* have a different relation to the social contract and to meaning. Precisely what this difference may mean, particularly if one wants to avoid rather naive generalisations, is difficult to establish, but it certainly exists, both in the relationship that women have to motherhood, and the latter's effects on sublimation and idealisation. Thirdly and as a consequence of woman's position in the social contract, the terms "mind" and "body" have conventionally been diametrically opposed, leading to the notion that the figure of the woman philosopher or the female intellectual is an impossibility. The first term is incompatible with the second, to the extent that the figure becomes aporetic. Kristeva knows such a conundrum is not evaded as easily as Cixous manages to do in "The Laugh of the Medusa", where she happily privileges "unthinking" as a kind of "spending" that women are most suited to do. Rendering the unthinkable thinkable and the thinkable unthinkable is the dual strategy that

⁸⁷ Kaja Silverman is one critic who has isolated this double nature of Kristeva's thinking on women. I disagree with her diagnosis, but will develop my own critique of Silverman in Chapter Four. Consult Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), pp. 101 ff.

Kristeva takes on, which brings us to the final reason for the recessing of female subjectivity: *style*.

When I read Kristeva, I am aware of the very real pleasures that are to be derived from apprehending language as a material texture, from exploring the turns of critical reading, and from observing the transformations in meaning effected from one text to another. Above all, I sense the attraction of distance, of irony, of contradiction and ambiguity: of style, in other words. According to John Lechte, style "is the transcendence of death and thus of all (banal) realism. Style means that the work of art is inseparable from its production."⁸⁸ In this reading, the "death" that the subject undergoes before he begins to write is a crucial step in avoiding the banality that arises when a text (and author) fails to reflect on its own productivity as origin. Signs alone can bear the weight of this burden of loss (separation from the mother) that afflicts men and women. The ultimate sign that separation has successfully occurred is when a narrative transcends realism to confront, through language, the founding truth of our being: that that which we most desire is forever departed. The object of our gaze is always viewed as if from a wooded ridge. Irony is a form of style that distances itself from realism by the assumption of a mask and in this sense its particular structure fulfils the requirements that a position in language requires a *distance* from that first maternal home. But Kristeva also makes it clear that irony as *doubling* is the indispensable mark of the intellectual. Irony thus involves a kind of turning inside out, of *looping over* our first home that sets up an undecidability at the heart of speech. In the figure of "Sebastian Knight", for instance, Kristeva is both "there" and "not there" in his imaginary place. As Kristeva represents him to us, as she accomodates Nabokov's narratives to her own, and her own to Knight's, we have the distinct impression that she is "changing the place of things", and using the Nabokovian character as a means of saying something about her own (female? narcissistic?) subjectivity. In this way, "speaking as a woman" must be a

⁸⁸ "Kristeva's *Soleil noir* and Postmodernity", *Cultural Critique*, No. 18, (Spring 1991), p. 116.

highly self-conscious gesture, the product of a style that simultaneously *undoes* style in its double movement of distancing itself from its object (the mother is unattainable except through language) and then doubling back on itself through irony, contradiction and word play to establish a discreet/discrete site of privilege for the female intellectual. ("I know I have lost my mother, but all the same".) Separation undoubtedly remains the precondition for thought, yet something else remains alongside: a dazzling narcissistic residue (a new form of "transcendence", perhaps?) which can be read as a speaking against the grain of the text to produce a profound ambivalence or unreadability.

1.3. Reading strangely

Life is most fully present when the life of the writer and the writing of the life merge, breaking down the distinction between subject and object; between woman as writer or woman as written, woman as reader or woman as read . . .

Mary Jacobus, *Reading Woman*⁸⁹

Any chain of language is invested with a spending-focus that links the body to its biological and social history.

Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language*⁹⁰

Listen to the piercing musicality of the Kristevan phrase: perhaps no other theorist writing today has that seductive combination of authority and eloquence. Reflecting on the inevitable intersection in writing of subjective and objective modes of criticism, Mary Jacobus writes with an acuteness and lucidity that makes her work both provoking and immediately accessible, but when Julia Kristeva comes to speak on the same question, I surrender to an altogether different kind of reading experience. Stranded in an unfamiliar zone that is neither metaphysical nor poetic, I witness literally what Mallarmé has called "elocutionary disappearance". The void that language opens in the text causes me to experience emptiness, because I recognise that while a "spending focus"

⁸⁹ *Reading Woman: Essays in Feminist Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1986), p. 22.

⁹⁰ *Desire*, p. 99.

appears to add a comforting density to discourse, it does so at the cost of identity. "Subjective" and "objective" become anaphoric markers constituted on loss, on the gap that opens within the subject of writing that adds a dangerous excess to the ego and renders its object unmasterable.

This apocalyptic cast to Kristeva's discourse that draws me in even as it empties "me" of existence, acts out the upheaval the textual body undergoes when its subject begins to write; when *style* changes the face of things and so opens on to questions of life and death. One of the compelling things about her work is precisely this linkage between writing, the unnameable, and the most fundamental of human processes. But what gives Kristeva the authority to make such claims? How much of her persuasion rests on what Roman Jakobson calls a "contagious voice"? Is there an underlying theoretical strata which energises this rhetoric, and if so, how can it be described? What are the circumlocutions of Kristeva's elocutionary act?

Thinking about these questions in relation to the two passages above automatically becomes emblematic of larger issues: how can I account for a continuing fascination with a writer whose style is not only wilfully opaque and elliptical, but who has gradually eased herself out from any engagement with what is conventionally understood as the "political," and for whose works the current academic preoccupation with marginalities clearly has little interest?⁹¹ What was once an invigorating re-working of Marxist, semiotic, and psychoanalytic theory has led over time to a withdrawal from the public scene altogether, culminating in her acknowledgements that the concern of psychoanalysis for the subject was of altogether more help than any programmatic involvement in politics.⁹² Yet still

⁹¹ See, for example, Paul Smith's recent essay "Julia Kristeva et Al.; or, Take Three or More" in Feldstein and Roof eds. (1989), pp. 84-104.

⁹² Speaking on this question to Rosalind Coward, Kristeva once said, "And personally from the point of view of my own development I thought that it would be more honest for me not to engage politically but to try to be helpful or useful in a narrow field, where the individual life is concerned, where the individual way of expression is concerned, and where I can do something more objective and maybe more sharp, and more independent of different political pressures." From "Julia

I find Kristeva compelling: from the stiff, but innovative formalism of the early texts to her latest published reflections on love and melancholy, I am drawn to her voice by the "need to know." What does she understand of the search for meaning and desire in language? Of women and philosophy? Or of women and creativity? How does she view the power of institutions, especially that of the State? How does she read suffering? And love? I am led, in accounting for my attraction, to a study of the *reading relationship* that has grown between "us" over the years, since it is by subjecting this relationship to scrutiny that I will be able more honestly and comprehensively to assess the impact of her work.

Kristeva's writing is difficult stylistically and intellectually. For a reader with little knowledge of European philosophy - its tropes and givens, its manner of argument - her thought is formidable, drawing on a huge range of texts and discourses, appropriating, challenging, synthesising where necessary. Further, this difficulty is compounded when her work is read in translation, as Margaret Waller acknowledges in her preface to *Revolution in Poetic Language*.⁹³ In both cases, an "easy readability" is out of the question. For if a thesis provides the opportunity to construct an argument and test it out against a body of work, demonstrating one's skill and comprehension, it also quickly leads its author to concede the boundaries of her knowledge. The challenge in encountering Kristeva has in large measure been accompanied by a recognition of the limits of my own intellect as much as it has been a critique of a chosen subject. However, learning to negotiate difficult terrain carries its own rewards - namely a keener awareness of how meaning (as both recognisable product *and* process) is formulated for a subject.

Kristeva in Conversation with Rosalind Coward". In Lisa Appignanesi ed., *Desire*, I.C.A. Documents (London: 1984), p. 25.

⁹³ According to Waller, the "text's density and difficulty force the translator to determine at every turn whether to separate the signifier from the signified and when to privilege, in the name of clarity, the latter over the former. . . In some instances, such alterations had stylistic, particularly syntactic consequences: specifying antecedents, changing nouns to verbs, making passive verb forms active, breaking up and sometimes rearranging sentences, as well as inserting paragraph breaks." *RPL*, p. ix.

From the point of view of appropriating meaning as *product*, the activity of understanding is in large measure related to finding equivalent terms for those under discussion, to be able to apply them, and to move competently from one context to another. The notion of product assumes a knowable object and a knowing subject. From one point of view, the reader as critic accords to the signifying object (the text) a *priority*. That is, criticism assumes its task to be one of respectful explication of an already-there meaning. It invests, writes Kristeva, in "*One Affirmation*". The author and critic both stand *outside* the system of the text. As Benveniste had observed, "I" is in a position of transcendence in relation to "you".⁹⁴ This is even the case when alongside the respect paid to the prior text, the critic is equally involved in a struggle for power, where the unthinkable is acknowledged to be accessible to a consciousness that progressively eliminates its other and sublates itself in a mastery of the object. Understanding is thus a light that breaks into the mind and transforms the object of its investigation into something homely, comfortable, familiar. Of course, as we have seen, reading involves a sense of surprise and estrangement. What is oblique often resists illumination; what is at first overlooked may after later associations be reinstated through a second reading, adding to the text's density; the sheer outrageous novelty of an expression or argument may take us by surprise: all of these instances momentarily obstruct the reader, adding to the struggle for lucidity.

Under these conditions where meaning is read as product, the mechanics of thought operates by moving from the unfamiliar to the familiar through naturalising strangeness. Naturalising procedures allow a *thesis* to be formulated and tested; communicability orders the play of signifiers and attempts to fix limits so that the transcendental ego may claim from language a meaning for itself. What happens, however, when meaning is construed as a *process*? If it is true that understanding works in the way that I have just outlined, it is at the same time an inadequate description. For understanding is as much a constructive process

⁹⁴ See further details on Benveniste and the transcendental ego in Chapter Two.

as a reflection of an already prior object. The mastery of language's categorial functions presupposed by thetic activity is founded on a repression, since formulating an argument turns a blind eye to the *dialogic* aspect of language. Reading is a kind of affective transference that involves adopting the mutually interchangeable roles of analyst and analysand. Just as the power of the transference derives from the analyst's ability to sweep the analysand off her feet by the unexpectedness of the interpretation, the conviction of analytical discourse rests on a speech that is put together co-operatively. In this way analysis confesses it is founded on a fundamental lack of absolute knowledge, not an original plenitude. And in confessing its weakness, it allows itself to be transformed by the speech of the other. Knowledge is founded then, on estrangement, on a dazzling that confuses subject and object. In reading no-one knows who achieves mastery, for the reader discovers herself to be both narrator and narratee, one who reads and one who is read. Therefore the space of interpretation becomes double, indeterminate, unhomely. For where language is continually oriented to and produced by an Other, it becomes the place where the concept of *thesis* itself is deconstructed. In these terms, the drive to stabilise a position is more appropriately connected with the ego-centric misrecognitions of the imaginary: with heliocentrism, in other words.

When, as Jacobus would have it, the distinction between subject and object breaks down, mastering meaning through knowledge gives place to charting the process of the desiring, enunciating subject through the text. Knowledge has a fundamental discursive quality whose productivity is in its most general expression the reflection of the intersection in writing between author and addressee (the other); and in a more particular specular sense, of the writer's work with that of the critic. If reading Kristeva had been a transparent and unresisting activity, there would have been less need to reflect on the *acts and processes* from one to the other, from subject to object, that reading involves. Nor would I have been led to explore what Jacobus calls the "otherness of the letter", where

Kristeva estranges and doubles literal (phallogocentric) meaning through a "move that installs strangeness (femininity) within reading itself."⁹⁵ Accordingly, the reader can no longer stand solely in a place of transcendence exterior to the language of the text. Instead, she is drawn into its orbit and experiences its regenerative qualities, as it were, from within.

From the outset, I am attracted to Kristeva's suggestion that language carries a surplus which is material. Its "spending-focus" is of a materialist and biological nature because according to Kristeva it invokes the drives (as identified by Freud); and dialectical and historical because these drives operate within and across the subject through the "*linear* order of language". (*Desire*: 102, my emphasis) However, a material, historical subject for Kristeva is not a subjective, psychological one. Materiality here relates less to experience than to its disintegration through the presence of *affect*, the eruption of the drives into language in the form of "rhythmic, meaningless, anterior memory". (*Desire*: 32) When the presence of the enunciation is seen to intrude into the utterance, it is not registered as the presence of the author, but as the destabilising effects of *signifiante* which works to differentiate the subject from itself and to reconnect it to its primary objects. It is the site of *production*, the unconscious and its effects in language as it pierces the neutral, unified subject that Kristeva insists is the crucible in which subjectivity is produced. In this sense, affect carries the burden of a First Cause without the latter's accessibility to meaning. Where this is the case, elocutionary disappearance causes a personal narrative to fade, or become obscure. Thus from the edge of the void, the subject who reads confronts both her own nullity, and the prospect of renewal and transformation through the speech of the other.

Naturally, it is impossible for the writer/reader to mechanically separate her own act of criticism into product and production. Our love, our desire for the other is

⁹⁵ Jacobus (1986), p. 286.

at once irrational and affective as well as open to analysis. Although if it is true that "it is in the chain of the signifier that the meaning 'insists'", then following this chain as "I" construct it, with all the richly associative bypaths that may be involved is the only course open to me.⁹⁶ Kristeva speaks in *Tales of Love* of being "under the hold of personal predilection as love demands . . .". (*Tales*: 17) Who knows why we choose the love-objects we do? It is just so with reading. We rationalise our predilections after the fact. In the chapters that follow I attempt to account for the idiosyncratic directions of my reading as an intellectual and the extent to which they have determined my analysis of Kristeva. How has a text moved me? What is its hold? How does it work to transform the domestic into the unhomely? I focus especially on those reading experiences that have had at once a powerfully constituting effect on my own image as woman and intellectual, alongside engendering an acknowledgement that reading (Kristeva) strangely puts all fixed images into question.

When Jacqueline Rose described her attachment to Sylvia Plath recently, she wrote of her love for the "imaginary" Plath in terms of a "ghost" who haunted her with its illusory presence.⁹⁷ Could I represent Kristeva in the same light? The publicity photograph gracing the covers of *Desire in Language* and *Powers of Horror* with that enigmatic stare resting on some distant point (rather like one of Bellini's Madonnas, in fact) is a tantalising invitation to construct an imaginary family scene, precisely the kind of construction that Kristeva has frequently criticised.⁹⁸ Yet some identification is inevitable, even desirable. Undoubtedly my

⁹⁶ "The Agency of the Letter" in Lacan (1977), p. 153. Anthony Easthope, commenting on the way meaning is constructed through the elimination or absence of other possible significations, writes: "The presence of meaning along the syntagmatic chain necessarily depends upon the absence of the Other, the rest of language, from the syntagmatic chain." In *Poetry as Discourse* (London: Methuen, 1986), p. 37.

⁹⁷ *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath* (London: Virago, 1991), p. 10

⁹⁸ See the translated excerpt from "Oscillation du 'pouvoir' au 'refus'", an interview by Xavière Gauthier first published in *Tel Quel*, No. 58, (Summer 1974) and translated by Marilyn A. August in Marks and de Courtivron eds. (1981), pp. 165-7. The following comment is illuminating: "When a woman novelist does not reproduce a real *family* of her own, she creates an imaginary story through which she constitutes an identity: narcissism is safe, the ego becomes eclipsed after freeing itself, purging itself of reminiscences". (p. 166)

reconstructions of the Kristeva I know are imaginary, but if reading does involve transference, for me it does not exclude whatever transitory identifications that may illuminate this passion of the subject. Therefore, one could ask, what sort of a (textual) model was she for me? What was it in her writing, despite its flaws, that I continued to find so attractive? Catherine Clément in speaking of her relationship with Lacan, describes it as love:

Sure, it was love. When you're always on time for every appointment, when nothing can make you miss one, when you leave disappointed sometimes but always enamoured, what else can it be? I'm well aware that this sort of thing is no longer "in". People call it "dogmatism". And it's true: love of this sort gives rise to self-betrayal, intransigence, the end of intellectual independence. But it can also give rise to another kind of thought, a kind of thought that is at war with itself and that in the most favourable of circumstances destroys its object. There remains a "hard core" attached to the love object - the object that originally elicited love. And that hard core of my original love for Lacan is something that I still carry with me, even if I have shed the husks, skins, and shells that used to surround it.⁹⁹

It is inevitable, Clément continues, that we are formed by thinking different "others". "In any body of thought there is an adolescent figure, never entirely effaced."¹⁰⁰ "Little by little, hour by hour, week by week, there was woven in us an implacable mesh of language, unconscious but effective, that had the property of rendering all other modes of thought obsolete . . . This is how a dogma is born."¹⁰¹

In his essay on Leonardo da Vinci, Freud writes that "biographers are fixated on their heroes in a quite special way. In many cases they have chosen their hero as the subject of their studies because - for reasons of their personal emotional life - they have felt a special affection for him from the first."¹⁰² He goes on to suggest

⁹⁹ *The Lives and Legends of Jacques Lacan*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 16.

¹⁰⁰ Clément (1983), p. 17.

¹⁰¹ Clément (1983), p. 13.

¹⁰² SE XI, p. 130.

that he too may have made a narcissistic object-choice in selecting Leonardo in the first place. Discussing the passage, Mary Jacobus observes: "But at precisely the moment when he implicates his own narcissism, Freud turns away to inquire into the theoretical achievements and limits of psychoanalytic biography . . . Freud's account of Leonardo's too great investigative sublimation puts his own theoretical investigation on the line."¹⁰³ Jacobus uses this oversight to return Freud to the maternal body which pushes all forms of theoretical mastery beyond its limits, whereas I could move her speculation in another direction and examine the implications of a particular object-choice: the Kristevan text. For it is clear that the reasons some readers have for preferring Kristeva over Cixous and Irigaray for instance, and the energies subsequently expended in grappling with her work are the product of a chain of relationships, beginning with the earliest familial structurings, and complemented by a certain history of reading affects.

But the question of narcissism which, moreover, returns us to Barthes' and Heidegger's anxiety over banality, remains a major stumbling block. Writing of secondary narcissism in the female adolescent, Freud has this to say:

Women, especially if they grow up with good looks, develop a certain self-contentment which compensates them for the social restrictions that are imposed upon them in their choice of object. Strictly speaking, it is only themselves that such women love with an intensity comparable to that of the man's love for them. Nor does their need lie in the direction of loving, but of being loved; and the man who fulfils this condition is the one who finds favour with them.¹⁰⁴

Rachel Brownstein responds to Freud's remarks by recognising their perspicacity, and suggests that "the idea of autoeroticism as compensation for social restriction has real interest for feminists."¹⁰⁵ Brownstein is interested in women reading novels, and in their desire to be heroines. "An addiction to fiction, to getting as it were high on heroines," is quite common: "All women", she writes, "with a

¹⁰³ Jacobus (1986), p. 165.

¹⁰⁴ SE XIV, pp. 88-9.

¹⁰⁵ *Becoming a Heroine: Reading About Women in Novels* (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1984), p. xv.

hungry susceptibility to a comprehensible self-image can be said to suffer from it."¹⁰⁶ Brownstein additionally recognises that these predilections may be metaphorical: "I am writing about how the self and self-consciousness are mutually and problematically involved, and involved in literary form and in language."¹⁰⁷

Julia Kristeva is more a critic than a novelist. Nevertheless, choosing at this point to emphasise a reading relationship where attention is directed to the problematics of inserting the self into writing, *does* represent a form of narcissism. Brownstein and Freud seem to concur that narcissism is a form of compensation for isolation from the social. To what extent does its inflection here indicate imprisonment in an exchange of images where the other is always reduced to the same, and where estrangement is mastered so that the other neither recedes nor merges with us, but comes to reflect our own experience? It seems to me that an answer lies in an emphasis on the transactional, but simultaneously disturbing nature of reading. If we put together a subjectivity, it is provisional; accompanying a "concentration" of identity is its "dissolution".¹⁰⁸ Or, as John Lechte expresses it, "the history of love will have analytic effects if we read it with love: that is, with the capacity to turn our reading into an 'event' of our own subjectivity that is also partly constitutive of this subjectivity."¹⁰⁹ Autobiography as a mode of analysis that fails to interrogate its own constitution is a dead end for criticism. A thesis is principally an act of positing, not autoeroticism, or confession. The passion of the subject only becomes thetic when desire is displaced in language; in the same way it is not the perception of the apple tree that is of prime concern to the critic, no matter how delightful this

¹⁰⁶ Brownstein (1984), p. xx.

¹⁰⁷ Brownstein (1984), p. xxi.

¹⁰⁸ Kristeva herself stresses both of these aspects that pertain to the distinctiveness of the female subject when she comments to Francoise van Rossum-Guyon on the nature of the personal analysis she experienced: "It was at once a concentration and a dissolution of 'identity', the individual image or photo standing in for the family or institution." See "Talking about *Polylogue*", trans. Seán Hand in Moi ed. (1987), p. 114. Originally published as "A partir de *Polylogue*" in *Revue des sciences humaines*, Vol. XLIV, No. 168, (Oct.-Dec. 1977), pp. 495-501.

¹⁰⁹ Lechte (1990), p. 184.

may be. As Husserl reminds us when we reflect on its loveliness, it is the perception of a perception that is most important for the intellectual. Yet this does not necessarily imply that our thesis requires a subject blind to its inner differences or exiled from affect. Kristeva's more recent emphasis on the unfinished, co-operative nature of meaning and subjectivity suggests that the mysterious processes of reading and speech draw us out from the enclosures of narcissism into a more generous, transformative space supported by a loving Other.

"Nothing is more common place than the reading experience, and yet nothing is more unknown", remarked Tzvetan Todorov.¹¹⁰ Kristeva would agree, although her version of the "unknown" would be very different from that of her compatriot. Speaking on the nature of the interpretive position in "Psychoanalysis and the Polis", she maintains that the need to engender an object with unequivocal meaning arises because the subject wishes to reassure himself of his own identity when confronted by an enigmatic other.¹¹¹ The function of the object, then, may not only be to throw light on the interpretation, but equally to reveal to the analyst what his theory ignores or cannot see: its *unheimlich*, in other words. Because of the constitutive gap on which language is founded, it would therefore be a deception to imagine that interpretation could entirely close it. Meaning, critical analysis, and reading are all inherently limited projects, their formulations of identity at best only tentative. At their most rigid and extreme, they represent a form of foreclosure, a fall into the very first object of plenitude which is then embodied in the imaginary figure of the phallic mother.

110 "Reading as Construction" in Susan Suleiman and Inge Crossman eds., *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 67. Reader response theory is a vast field and it would be improper here not to mention at least one of its founders: Wolfgang Iser. Iser writes in *The Act of Reading* of the reader's quest for "meaning" as being launched by an experience of the strange and unfamiliar, a voyage that I have touched on in the above attention to meaning as "product". The gap in meaning and intention which underlies Iser's conception of the literary text - the "indeterminate, constitutive blank" - has affiliations with Kristeva and others, but ultimately the reader is dependent for her pleasure on the prior structures of the text and her own judging (interpretive) consciousness. See *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978).

111 First published in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 9, No. 1, (Sept. 1982). This edition in Moi ed. (1986), pp. 302-350.

Kristeva hypothesises that the origin of the desire for mastery lies in an experience she names abjection. Where the object appears as an elusive other just beyond the subject's comprehension, what is aroused in the subject who reads this other is an instinctual memory that recalls a primitive state prior to the formation of subjectivity. In this state that attempts to break away from the all-sufficient mother lies horror, fascination, estrangement: "This abject awakens in the one who speaks archaic conflicts with his own improper objects, his ab-jects, at the edge of meaning, at the limits of the interpretable. And it arouses the paranoid rage to dominate these objects, to transform them, to exterminate them." ("PatP": 318) The experience of reading leads us to recognise as abject all that cannot be read, or that resists a determinate meaning. We flee from the encounter with obscurity because its blinding qualities deprive us of a sense of a self at home with itself. The enormity of loss and confusion fills our vision and disturbs our dreams. Thus to be in a state of indeterminacy is to remain a captive of abjection, perhaps the supreme example of estrangement in a world with no God.

This borderline experience where matter appears to exist completely deprived of names and identities is understood by Kristeva as being an indispensable part of the experience of reading. But by remaining permanently dominated by abjection we risk eventually giving the nameless a final identity and final meaning: Man the Enemy; Woman the phallic Master. We can see therefore, that abjection unchecked leads to hatred or destruction of self *and* other. Now up until *Tales of Love*, Kristeva appeared to have no mechanism in place to bear the burden of this devastating form of estrangement that abjection gave rise to in the subject. In fact, as I argue in Chapter Three, she was initially preoccupied with effacing all conventional notions of transcendence, a term that might once have been able to subdue abjection. With the notion of the Imaginary Father developed in that more recent book however, one can see the emergence of a figure able to provide relief from pure indeterminate matter. Earlier emphasis on the need for a third

party that would intervene between mother and child has in *Tales of Love* been transformed into the necessary, "direct and immediate" identification with this Father. I will discuss the complexities of primary identification in Chapter Four, but for the moment my interest lies in the weight accorded to such an experience, for in many respects, its representation is remarkably similar to the form of the strange epiphanies with which the chapter began.

If formerly the figure of the sun had been identified by Kristeva as the representative of Symbolic law against which the poet struggled in intense Oedipal conflict,¹¹² by 1983 the Father's agency is redefined as a "warm dazzling", a "godsend" that is directly responsible for turning us towards the intimations of an Other. These intimations are from one point of view, traces which the infant *reads*,¹¹³ and so they cannot have the transcendent quality which Beckett concludes lies in the Proustian experience. Nor can we strictly speaking, equate them with Hegel's sunflash which bursts across the horizon, illuminating and changing everything in its path. Identification, represented in language as instantaneous and unmediated is in actuality for Kristeva a *performative* act. Furthermore, indeterminacy (and hence abjection) still lies at the heart of reading as performance, since the "immediate transference toward the imaginary father" gives us "the impression that it is he who is transferred into you". (*Tales*: 41) And yet the very theological cast of Kristeva's discourse leads to the conclusion that indeterminacy and performance have been mysteriously redeemed.

Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia, first published in 1987, is more explicit still. Having dispensed with the celestial calm that descends on the writer as an after-effect of epilepsy, nevertheless when she comes to speak on the nature of forgiveness in Dostoyevsky, Kristeva (involuntarily?) describes it as a "flash" that

¹¹² See for instance, "The Ethics of Linguistics" in *Desire*, especially pp. 28-30, where the poetic craft of Mayakovsky is discussed.

¹¹³ Cynthia Chase also makes this point in her essay "Desire and Identification in Lacan and Kristeva". See Feldstein and Roof eds. (1989), pp. 65-83.

leads to reconciliation with a Figure or Power that has become distant. Such tones are indeed reminiscent of the apostle Paul's experience on the road to Damascus whose intensity left him blinded but repentant. The time of forgiveness has a transcendent quality to it, albeit imaginary, because it momentarily removes the subject from history: "Forgiveness *renews the unconscious* because it inscribes the right to narcissistic regression within History and Speech." (BS: 205) In addition, the chance for a new loving identification is opened by forgiveness, which re-enacts that first miraculous form of primary identification. Horror and abjection are not so much washed away as passed through and re-incorporated in a new speech, in the possibility of new relations with an other. This alternation between pain and redemption is re-inscribed in reading ("analytical listening") and writing. Without the miracle of transference to the other however, reading and writing could not occur. Thus it is that the human subject is reminded at one and the same time of his perpetual incompleteness and his capacity for creating works of great beauty.

The brilliant inventiveness of what the text names "aesthetic forgiveness" should not blind the reader to recognising a new emphasis on the foundational nature of meaning which forgiveness presupposes. True, it is not an immutable Meaning, but one arising from "assertion and inscription", and thus subject to change. Equally, what Kristeva terms meaning is not rationally apprehended, since it is defined as "an acting out, a doing, a *poiesis* . . . without exegesis, without explanation, without understanding." (BS: 206-7) Nevertheless we can recognise that if an indeterminacy still exists at the origins of identification and hence reading, for Kristeva this does not need to lead to a radical scepticism about knowledge or a black despair at the nature of human existence. Instead, it should encourage us to live life in hope of its permanent renewal in creative engagement with the "speech" of the other. Perhaps this form of enlightenment is one of the few forms of truth today that can remove scales from our eyes.

I do not find in this more recent Kristeva a programme for reaffirming One Identity and Meaning. The figure of the Imaginary Father and the capacity of speech to absorb suffering through forgiveness do not indicate an explicit commitment to phenomenology, although paradoxically they do rest on the associations provided by its discourse. For despite her continued insistence on the ultimate importance of separation for all subjects, I would argue that there are moments when Kristeva appears to perform an about-face and with the assistance of irony, word play, and narcissistic self-reference assert that the position of the female intellectual may indeed be a privileged one. Such a doubling can only add to the forms of estrangement explored in and enacted by her texts. If style is an aestheticising of an original estrangement, then insinuating that separation itself is never a determinate affair (for women; for artists; for melancholics, for instance) gives style a new complexity. It invests it with a new form of "transcendence", and so reconnects it with the unnameable. Clearly though, this is a hypothesis that cannot be proved. Is the Kristeva I have identified really encoded in the text, or are the signifiers that I have associated to form an argument merely the random effects of language? Have I wished too intently to domesticate the strangeness of reading? What relation exists between inscription as hieroglyph and inscription as readable (phenomenological) sign? These questions persist as a background against the wider text of my thesis, which examines the relations between estrangement and the female intellectual in a range of Kristeva's texts. I discover that to a certain degree, she retains metaphysical notions of estrangement that occur as enigmatic moments of "appearance" in excess of consciousness. She also retains the figure of woman, although she does not permit her a permanently privileged identity. When these forms of "appearance" and "identity" are read against Kristeva's anti-phenomenological commitments, they give rise to a paradox or contradiction which cannot be resolved, but which for me makes her work as intriguing as it makes it vulnerable to the charge of "inconsistency".

Ultimately I cannot insist on either the indubitability or the exhaustiveness of my argument. It is offered rather as the product of a certain performative reading that has conferred significance on certain aspects of a text and not on others. It has been written out of the recognition that Kristeva's writing contained anomalies on the nature of identity, particularly on female identity which were worth illuminating, but it has equally been my desire to explore her preoccupation with estrangement as a radical and often violent revival of otherness, and with language as the only medium through which that elusive notion is at once posited and explored. In her role as female voyager, Kristeva moves adroitly between the shores of a "chez-soi" and the place of the Other, negotiating the strange terrain that exists where language and subjectivity intersect. In the chapters that follow, we will attempt to chart the process of this voyage, and Chapter Two begins by taking us back to the early days in Paris where Kristeva's experience of exile is so nicely rendered with that evocative expression of Barthes' when he first named her, "l'étrangère".¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ "L'étrangère" in *Le bruissement de la langue* (Paris: Seuil, 1984), pp. 197-200. First published in *La Quinzaine littéraire*, 1970, to mark the publication of Kristeva's *Séméiotiké*.

CHAPTER TWO

AN ALIEN IN THE CITY OF LIGHTS

We are today confronted by an obsession with the unnameable . . .

Julia Kristeva, *Le texte du roman*

Her work is . . . that which one with a scandalised air names as terrorism.

Roland Barthes, *L'étrangère*

2. 1. An unthinkable subject

France at the close of the nineteenth century was a bourgeois society driven by a spirit of rationalism. Into this claustrophobic space, Kristeva argued, the writing of Mallarmé and Lautréamont released dramatically new forms of representation that were to have powerful effects on language, aesthetics, and social practice. Post-1945 France lay in the grip of a similar rationalism after witnessing a world war of horrific and unthinkable proportion. Consequently French Statist policies looked towards re-establishing a secure social order for its people. The subsequent upheaval of thought and society that occurred in the sixties and seventies in France could perhaps be understood as this century's counterpart to the work of the two *fin de siècle* writers who dared to reimagine their conceptual enclosures. Here at least is where I would locate Julia Kristeva: a theorist of language and society during a time of considerable social unrest whose texts rejoin and are a riposte to those first avant-garde writers she so admired.

"To penetrate the era," she wrote, "poetry had to disturb the logic that dominated the social order and do so through that logic itself, by assuming and unraveling its position, its syntheses, and hence the ideologies it controls." (RPL: 83) If Mallarmé and Lautréamont had managed in different ways to introduce an "excess" into literature, the contemporary text could take up that excess and use it in a more radical manner to unmask the fundamental violence that for Kristeva founded identity. Such a practice demanded that linguistic codes encrusted in formalism and rhetoric be broken open and the whole conceptual edifice re-cast to incorporate the "subject's vehemence" in its very methods and procedures. And to begin to conceptualise the unnameable as the motivation for objective reality called for audacious thought: terrorism, in effect.

In this second chapter I will examine Kristeva's passion for theoretical excess as it is displayed in some of her early writing. What concerns me here is the manner in which the intellectual discourses of the time are appropriated and transformed into a transgressive discourse uniquely her own. When interviewed by Perry Meisel for *Partisan Review* in 1980, she spoke of the work of art as "a kind of matrix that makes its own subject."¹ The subject Kristeva had in mind here is one produced by and through a signifying practice. Endlessly generated and negated within the literary text, this subject is a stranger to identity since it does not recognise the psychological ego, positing in its place a potentially infinite *function* or *thickening* of language. Yet at the same time, the subject draws on material supports (voice, body, rhythm) impossible to fully register but which nonetheless constantly renew language. The challenge to thought and practice then came from this unthinkable "exterior" and called for a radical overhaul of what it meant to be an intellectual in France in the sixties. Rejecting conventional notions of political engagement, Kristeva was to look towards a revolution located in the speaking subject and its language that would in turn dig away the supports of a society she believed to be bankrupt.

¹ "Two interviews with Julia Kristeva", (II) Perry Meisel. *Partisan Review*, Vol. 51, No. 1, (1984), p. 131.

Additionally therefore, I will examine the constructions and contexts that surrounded this subject. Who were the master-thinkers who inspired her to emulation and to what extent was she willing to maintain a critical distance? How important was the materiality of the subject for structuralism? existentialism? psychoanalysis? And what of the question of gender? Michèle le Doeuff reminds us that there is always something of the philosopher in philosophy.² How then was the subject of enunciation reflected in Kristeva's early work? For instance, I note clear discrepancies between her textual practice and the textual practices of her female contemporaries. Do these gaps reflect a hostility toward women, or does she consider the absence of gender to be the necessary prerequisite for true intellectual thought? These questions will be explored in relation to the dominant cultural and political discourses that gripped Paris in the sixties and early seventies. Unquestionably, the most publicised debates over our period were those conducted largely by men, yet this euphoric and contestatory intellectual climate also offered an appropriately formative context for Kristeva's own theories. Male rather than female intellectuals constituted her "others". They provided the major stimulus - and largely composed the addressees - for the brilliant young linguist who arrived in Paris from Bulgaria at the end of 1965.

2. 2. A "rare conjunction"

Speaking of her early days in France, she had remarked to Perry Meisel that it was a unique period in French history:

Intellectually there was the very interesting coexistence of the discovery of Russian formalism through Lévi-Strauss; a certain revival of Marxism, also on the background of structuralism . . . and a third very important current, the renewal of psychoanalysis through Lacan . . . So

² *Hipparchia's Choice: An Essay Concerning Women, Philosophy, Etc*, trans. Trista Selous (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 137.

it was a kind of intellectual turmoil, a sort of real theoretical fever . . . It was a very, very rare conjunction.³

Kristeva's description is indeed correct. From the mid-sixties through to the mid-seventies, French intellectual history experienced a renaissance that witnessed massive increases in published theoretical works, widespread, internationally publicised debate and controversy, and the emergence of leading personalities, whose individual idiosyncrasies were as much the site of interest as their densely written theoretical texts. In addition, 1968 gave birth to the May Revolution, where over several days it seemed that the whole of France had stopped work and taken to the streets in a mixture of carnival and aggression. For a brief time, people everywhere became caught up in this exhilarated mood where all structures of authority were challenged and where one spoke of the need to confront hierarchies of power with organised resistance.

So Kristeva's arrival in Paris at the close of 1965 was a kind of conjunction, a fortuitous combination of events where the writing career of a young woman from Eastern Europe trained as a linguist and working as a journalist intersected with this resurgence of thought that was galvanising French intellectuals. There were, of course, immediate effects. She rapidly assimilated the insights of structuralism and those of its critics. (Lévi-Strauss, Barthes, Todorov, Goldmann, Althusser and Greimas had all published various structuralist works by 1966. Derrida, Foucault and Lacan were some of the theorists who appropriated structuralism but also challenged its methodology and assumptions.⁴) From the very beginning, however, Kristeva's theoretical work was uniquely her own - a loose

³ Perry Meisel (1984), p. 128.

⁴ Major structuralist works in French include the following: Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Anthropologie structurale* (Paris: Plon, 1958); Roland Barthes, "Eléments de sémiologie", *Communications* 4, (1964), pp. 91-135; Tzvetan Todorov ed., *Théorie de la littérature* (Paris: Seuil, 1971); Lucien Goldmann, *Pour une sociologie du roman* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964); Louis Althusser, *Pour Marx* (Paris, 1965); A. J. Greimas, *Sémantique structurale* (Paris: Larousse, 1966). Post-structuralist work published around this date included: Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Minuit, 1967); Michel Foucault, *Les Mots et les choses* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966); Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits* (Paris: Seuil, 1966). It is difficult to discover just what Kristeva had encountered of structuralism before travelling to France. Certainly she would have been familiar with the Soviet structuralists and semioticians.

and often shifting synthesis of Marxism, post-formalism, linguistics and psychoanalysis⁵ - that consistently sought to articulate a new, enigmatic, *poetic* form of logic.

The influence of structuralist rigour and systematics was ubiquitous. For instance, in one of Kristeva's earliest essays "Word, Dialogue, and Novel", written in 1966 and published in *Séméiotiké: Recherches pour une sémanalyse* we see her considerable debt to structuralism's precisely ordered scientific vocabulary.⁶ Important principles are explained with the assistance of set theory and algebraic equations. The difficulty of reading models borrowed from the formal sciences leaves the reader with the impression of elitism; while this impression has some validity, the ultimate purpose of employing logical models was to found semiotics as the axiomatic site for signifying systems in general whereby language and the subject would be continually at risk from the pressures of an infinite generativity of meaning.

One recognises the way in which these essays endeavour to stretch the current debate on the theory of narrative beyond its limits. We know Kristeva was especially indebted to the writing of a Russian semiotician whose work she and Todorov drew to the attention of the West. M.M. Bakhtin's two texts, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* and *Rabelais and his World* illustrate his early awareness of the closed essentialistic nature of formalism which he responded to by presenting the structures of narrative as generative and non-essential.⁷ Kristeva's theories relied heavily on Bakhtin, but at the same time she assimilated

⁵ The major focus on psychoanalysis did not occur until the early seventies, although there are references to Freud, Lacan, the unconscious and dream logic in *Séméiotiké: Recherches pour une sémanalyse* (Paris: Seuil, 1969) and *Le Langage cet inconnu* (Paris: Seuil, 1969). This was originally published under the "pseudonym" of Julia Joyaux (Joyaux was Sollers' family name), and later translated as *Language the Unknown: An Initiation into Linguistics* by Anne M. Menke (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).

⁶ "Le Mot, le dialogue et le roman", in *Sém*, pp. 143-173. Translated as "Word, Dialogue, and Novel" in *Desire*, pp. 63-91.

⁷ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. R.W. Rotsel (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Ardis, 1973); *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1968).

lated his insights, retranslating them into a different textual context that sought to address new historical and social factors. Both structuralism and its critique were therefore inseparable aspects of her writing. Arriving in Paris at a time when intellectuals were still infatuated with systematising language and culture, she made use of the notion of system but engaged in an on-going debate with its validity as her analysis of Bakhtin demonstrates. Although the essays in *Séméiotiké* make dull reading now, I can sense some of the excitement that surrounded her determination to engage with the philosophical foundations of science and realist aesthetics and expose their exclusion of all that did not conform to reason.

It was the critique of essentialism that gave Kristeva a new terminology to negotiate the formality of structuralism. While paradoxically still remaining in the early essays heavily dependent on the procedures of reasoning that characterised science, she attempted to escape from its closures by formalising exactly that which escaped reason: the unthinkable residue that science must discard in order to proceed as a discipline. Semiotics as the study of signifying systems shares with other sciences a common methodology, operating by *exclusion* so that it may think its object. But Kristeva's object is the literary text, a strange non-object: "altérité", "dehors". Because the text is the site where meaning is constantly produced, it cannot be studied as a static object. Unorthodox procedures which turn customary terminology on its head must then be used to provide a model for a generative signifying practice. The opening essay of *Séméiotiké*, "Le texte et sa science", lays out the new paradigms that will be involved in studying the (literary) text.

Semiotics, or Kristeva's own term *sémanalyse*, thus became a complex practice that in analysing textual productivity unsettled the laws of logic even as it appealed to them. "Semanalysis" is semiotics liberated from mechanism; "a critique of meaning, its elements and its laws"; a privileged kind of scientific activity that

"unceasingly returns to its own founding principles, thinks and transforms them." (*Sém*: 19) Some of her most obscure logical formulations arose out of this concern to bring to light literature's mobility in relation to scientific procedure. The "contemporary mind-set" ["l'intelligence actuelle"] is simply unable to comprehend that there may be a different kind of object that eludes formalising, argued Kristeva. Yet this object is important for the science of signs, she maintained, precisely because it "indicates its limits." (*Sém*: 24) In other words, the disciplined analysis of structuralism was preserved alongside a desire to escape from its rigid understanding of system.

I think that we can see in these iconoclastic essays in *Séméiotiké* a nose-thumbing arrogance to the classically rigorous Parisian Academy. Many of the notorious *querelles* of the time, including the structuralist controversy, came from within the elite academic establishments of Paris, and were directed against their prevailing conservatism. When Kristeva took on the mantle of a precocious, youthful intellectual wrenching philosophy away from its supports, she was in part at least acting out the Oedipal struggle. If the fathers of philosophy had assumed a knowing subject and a knowable object, then the younger generation would take these assumptions by surprise in positing an endless process of critique and an unquantifiable, unrepresentable object. It is significant that throughout the length of *Séméiotiké*, Kristeva was not drawn to differentiate herself from the sons. Their struggle was hers. In fact, the prolific and path-breaking nature of some of this early work, and the admiring responses from her male contemporaries (Umberto Eco, Roland Barthes and Jean-Louis Houdebine for example) indicated that in many ways she was to be situated in the vanguard of critical masculine thought.⁸

⁸ See Barthes' essay "L'étrangère" (1984), pp. 197-200. See also a further review of *Séméiotiké* by Jean-Louis Houdebine, "Lectures d'une refonte: Julia Kristeva", *Critique*, No. 287, (1971), pp. 318-350.

Like Simone de Beauvoir a generation earlier, Kristeva found a dialogue with Marxism rather than feminism to be more productive for her theoretical work in its initial stages. From the remarks in the reflective essay written for the *New York Times*, we can see however that she clearly aligned herself in the early days with feminism. Recollecting some of her first conversations with Philippe Sollers, she wrote: "'We women, like the proletariat, have nothing to lose but our chains,' I used to say with a simplicity that could only have been disarming."⁹ Together with a friend, Sarah George-Picot, an interview with Kristeva was filmed on this question, "a precocious feminist document," she added, "that I believe is lost." ("MMH": 266) But these loyalties did not extend over into theoretical writing she produced at the time. There was no mention of oppression of women in *Séméiotiké*, and none of the sophisticated analyses directed at signification and the subject were claimed for feminism. On the contrary, she was more engaged by a reading of discourse that employed a *textualised* form of materialism.

Perhaps the most obvious example of the dialogue with Marxism is a 1968 essay entitled "Semiotics: a Critical Science and/or a Critique of Science", an attempt to align her work with that of the Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser.¹⁰ Althusser rejected the view that the economic was the sole determinant of history and argued instead that reality was equally the product of "overdetermination" on social, political, economic and religious levels of representation. Such a fusion of Marxism and structuralism made interacting textual forms the equivalent of the dialectical structures that had constituted the "material" for Marx. The text was therefore implicated in the forces of production along with other expressions of ideology although it was not, for Althusser, opened to an unnameable "outside".

⁹ Julia Kristeva, "My Memory's Hyperbole", trans. Athena Viscusi, in Domna Stanton ed., *The Female Autograph*, *New York Literary Forum*, No. 12&13, (1984), p. 266.

¹⁰ "La sémiotique: science critique et/ou critique de la science", in *Sém*, pp. 27-42 and translated by Seán Hand as "Semiotics: a Critical Science and/or a Critique of Science" in Toril Moi ed. (1986), pp. 74-88.

Renewal and transformation came from within the system of overdetermined materials.

Althusser insisted that Marx's principal debt to Hegel lay in his appropriation from idealist teleology the notion of the "procès sans sujet".¹¹ The concept of process without a human subject is an important one for us because it had some similarities with Kristeva's decentred "subject-in-process" and also because it encountered similar difficulties. Althusser's strict anti-humanism maintained that we do not create our lives by intentional acts, which he termed "voluntarism", but instead are produced by the prevailing social structure which is a changing system of processes. These processes are impersonal: they lack a subject at the centre, all the while allowing for the construction of individual subjectivity through the prevailing ideology which occurs by means of "interpellation" or hailing - a process rather like being accosted (positioned) by someone in authority over us.¹²

Equally as dangerous as the concept of an intentioned ego was historicism. Althusser's reservation about Marxism was that in upending Hegel, it had simply upended the *same* man. He believed that there was no such thing as history shaped by a conscious subject able to realise projects: "'man' has no history since there is no such thing as 'man'".¹³ His notion of process without a subject then, foregrounded the constant movement of different ideological structures within society but it lacked a persuasive theory of the subject governed by the material (affective) processes that constructed social praxis. Nevertheless, Althusser's anticipation of a genuine Marxist science that through a form of epiphany would

¹¹ The passage from *Lenin et la philosophie* (1972) reads: "The true Hegelian subject lies in teleology. If it were possible to remove teleology, the remaining philosophical category that Marx has inherited is that of process without a subject." Cited in Michael Kelly, *Modern French Marxism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), p. 183, my translation.

¹² See Paul Smith, *Discerning the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), pp. 14-21 for a reading of Marxist (and Althusserian) ideology.

¹³ From Althusser and Balibar's *Reading Capital*, in Arthur Hirsh, *The French New Left* (Boston: South End Press, 1981), p. 165.

finally cast off the shackles of humanism was likely to appeal to Kristeva because semiotics had to begin, she argued, by interrogating its own ideological formations. Semiotics breaks with its origins in its constant production of a new subject and new models. While still retaining a link to the former context, the radical challenge semiotics delivers to the status quo in part may be measured by the strange new context it supplies for old terminology. Clearly, the surplus-value of such a gesture is potentially boundless. Althusser had called this linguistic appropriation with the power to effect a conceptual revolution, "the novelty of non-novelty",¹⁴ and Kristeva was to make particular use of the principle of displacement and transposition of meaning in *Revolution of Poetic Language*.

However since Marxism could not avoid reification of the finished product, a more radical account of production for Kristeva was to be found in the theories of Freud, where the logic of the unconscious represented a "productive labour prior to value or meaning." ("Semiotics": 82) Bringing psychoanalysis to the text meant introducing a new kind of subject to Althusserian structuralism, the latter's concept of structures in process without a subject now being internalised by Kristeva in the dialectic between language and the unconscious that is produced *within* the subject. This would eventually lead to a reversal and an overturning of Althusser's term with her own expression, "le sujet en procès".¹⁵ But in *Séméiotiké*, while the speaking subject is established as one of the central emphases, psychoanalytical appeals to the unconscious were still subordinated to the application of linguistic, mathematical and logical models.

Not until 1974 with the publication of Kristeva's doctoral thesis *Revolution in Poetic Language* did psychoanalysis become a dominant structuring device. Here Kristeva both criticised Western capitalist society for repressing the processes that

¹⁴ See Kristeva's explanation of this term in "Semiotics", Moi ed. (1986), pp. 79-80.

¹⁵ See *RPL*, p. 22.

affect the status of the subject, and began at the same time to distance herself more openly from Marxism. For all its theorising, Marxism presupposed an atomistic subject unable to reflect on practice as excess. While she still wished to retain the notion of social practice which Marxism stressed, she argued that practice was not to be understood as the expression of an ideology or political programme but rather as a transgressive series of relations founded on the text as productivity. Consequently Kristeva's analyses in *Revolution in Poetic Language* increasingly linked psychoanalysis with semiotics to expose the privileged field of literature in an unorthodox way. The subject-in-process was the matrix to which she continually returned, its mobility determined less by an economy of *products* than a continuous *productivity* which operated in and across the material dialectics of language.

To return to our beginning: a "conjunction" implies the occurrence of events in combination or through proximity. It carries with it a sense of epiphany. I cannot help but feel that the events of the sixties in all their complexity afforded the same kind of fertile engendering to intellectual speculation as that which Kristeva wished to accord to the generating of textual productivity. As with any new field of thought, people wrote and spoke as if seized by the immanence of history. During that decade, a number of factors converged and interacted to give rise to a radical re-reading (an *estrangement*) of the relationship that was seen to exist between texts, society, and the subject of discourse. Julia Kristeva was instrumental in this formative activity; her contribution to a theory of the speaking subject remains one of the landmarks of contemporary French thought. Unlike Simone de Beauvoir whose work *The Second Sex* two decades earlier was isolated from main-stream intellectual discourse, Kristeva's writing on language and the subject was the toast of the Parisian intelligentsia. According to Michèle le Doeuff, to be a philosopher one is required to set "oneself up as a sovereign consciousness, bringing to bear the force of one's own person, in work as

elsewhere, in a tone suitable to the holder of a super-knowledge".¹⁶ In the case of a prospective female philosopher, maintained le Doeuff, it additionally requires the strength to free oneself from prohibition. That Kristeva's publications were accorded such respect from the beginning is indicative of the extent to which she had mastered philosophy's terms of reference and had internalised the kind of self-regard necessary to undertake critical thought in the first place; two factors which then made it possible for her to take full advantage of that fortuitous conjunction in history when theory had seemed to merge with delirium.

2. 3. The "homogenised history of ideas"

Why did social unrest sweep France in the late sixties? To what extent can it be linked to the more specialised conceptual revolution which shook the very foundations of intellectual life in Paris and elsewhere? Three decades ago, French society was noted for its resistance to the full rationalising forces of modernism.¹⁷ Highly sophisticated bureaucratic institutions (particularly in the areas of commerce and administration) were maintained alongside an anachronistic political system and a fragmented agricultural sector. One of the most rapidly industrialised of nations in Western Europe, from 1945 to 1966 those people engaged directly on the land in agricultural activities fell from 35 to 15 percent - a radical fall in relation to comparable figures for other Western nations. Correspondingly, the fifties witnessed the growth of a middle class; consumer-oriented yet traditionally educated, their outlook was constructed on what Posner calls "the profit motive, notions of strict economy and the patriarchal State".¹⁸ While Gaullism was equally ambitious to further its interests internationally through "spheres of influence",¹⁹ internal policies looked to

¹⁶ Michèle le Doeuff (1991), p. 151.

¹⁷ The following statistics and information are derived from the introduction to Charles Posner ed., *Reflections on the Revolution in France: 1968* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970).

¹⁸ Posner (1970), p. 22.

¹⁹ Kristeva in "MMH" writes of "the Gaullist dream of a 'Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals'", p. 264.

promote domestic harmony by allying the new industrial and administrative sectors with the growing middle classes through keeping wages down but living standards high.

It is appropriate to use such terms as political stability and buoyant economy in speaking of the Fifth Republic, but according to Delale and Ragache, prosperity was bought for a price. "La croissance sauvage" hit with particular keenness those on the periphery of society: immigrants, the old, housewives in "cités-dortoirs", young people, small family farmers threatened with "proletarianisation", lower-skilled and small-town workers.²⁰ National wealth grew faster than salaries; there were additional enormous disparities between for instance, a Parisian male and a female provincial worker's wages. An alliance between middle-class and business interests was not in the long run sustaining, and internal contradictions burst through to the surface in the massive industrial disturbances in May/June 1968, when up to 10 million workers all over France went on strike in protest against low wages and an increasingly spiralling cost of living. In addition, universities and lycées were overcrowded and underplanned, apart from the elite specialised *grandes écoles*. Administrations were hostile to change, and this resistance was one of the motivating factors in the conspicuous role students played in the '68 Revolution.

But as Kristeva acknowledged, alongside "social archaism" persisted "freedom of thought . . . unequalled elsewhere: outside of France there was nowhere else in the world where one could, in the heart of the most official institutions and in the spotlight of the media, draw simultaneously on Marx, Saint Augustine, Hegel, Saussure, and Freud." ("MMH": 264) For a small privileged group, a number of the higher institutions of learning in Paris such as the *Ecole des Hautes Etudes*, the *Collège de France* and the *Ecole Normale Supérieure* in the

²⁰ From Alain Delale et Gilles Ragache, *La France de 68* (Paris: Seuil, 1978). See espec. pp. 15-18.

sixties became, together with *Tel Quel*, the focus for a relatively new form of thought: structuralism.

Hypothesising in retrospect about the preoccupation with form that accompanied structuralism, Kristeva argued that the discourse of post-war France was romantic, wordy, bombastic. Officialese legitimated in and through the mass media linked with an audience caught up with reconstructing personal lives and recreating a sense of pride in national identity. Gaullism rode the crest of this assent to the shaping of collective values and vision into the sixties when gradually the prevailing social discourse began to be undermined.

The rhetoric that opened the way to modernity cut through the "verbal edema" of the past, replacing it with a formalist representation of experience. It can also be suggested, I think, that the dispassion of new novelists and structuralists after the forties in France in some measure represented a self-protective antidote to the horrifying irrationalism of Nagasaki, Hiroshima and the death camps. Natalie Sarraute, Alain Robbe-Grillet and Michael Butor, originators of the *nouveau roman*, wrote slim austere texts, intellectually incisive yet socially remote. Their worlds made no pretence of acknowledging the sacred, yet were not justified by a passionate appeal to secular history or to the choices of an anxious subject. As the prologue to Brecht's *Baal* reminds us, "Individuality is an arabesque we have discarded."²¹

The new fiction retained the concept of character but pared it down. Natalie Saurraute psychologised her characters, although the strategies she used to show that the outer world existed simply to encase the aggression between protagonists has a strange disorientating effect which makes it difficult to view them as having distinct identities. Moreover, distinctions based on gender were to Saurraute the product of "pure convention"; just so many "affirmations that can't be

²¹ Quoted in Stephen Heath, *The Nouveau Roman: A Study in the Practice of Writing* (London: Elek Books, 1972), p. 48.

proven". In August 1974 the results of a survey organised by *La Quinzaine littéraire* on "Does Writing Have a Sex?" were published. It included the response of Natalie Saurraute: "Who am I? What am I? These are questions I never ask myself when I write. At the level at which the inner dramas that I try to show are produced I am convinced there is no difference between men and women, as there is no difference between their respiratory or blood systems." ²²

The *nouveau roman* became increasingly elliptical, laundered of affect, and more and more sceptical about representation.²³ Instead, it leaned on the inner mechanisms of language denatured.²⁴ Perhaps the new novelists' denial of a humanist engagement in history through bypassing explicit criticism of ideology was seen by some intellectuals as a welcome alternative to existentialism and Marxism.

2.3. I. existentialism's anxious subject

Existentialism had flourished between the early forties and 1960. As a philosophical movement, its assumption of *l'engagement* distinguished it from the theories of literature and culture that were to follow in the sixties. Whereas the new novelists treated anonymity as the most fundamental and irreducible aspect of existence, Sartrean existentialism had placed an embattled but intentioned subject who may actively engage with the world at the centre of thought. From the vantage-point of the following decades, many theorists viewed existentialism as blind to what was most characteristic of our modern age: the crises of art, litera-

²² See Elaine Marks' "Women and Literature in France" in *Signs*, Vol. 3, No. 4, (1978), p. 838.

²³ For novelists like Sarraute and Robbe-Grillet, anonymity was the preferred mode of representing the subject in the text, thus: "In recognition of the fact that the 'character novel belongs well and truly to the past' . . . Robbe-Grillet maintains that character should take the form of an 'anonymous, translucent *he*, simple subject of the action expressed by the verb' . . . The elimination of proper name in favour of some pronominal cipher is advocated by all these writers as a means of achieving authentic anonymity." Ann Jefferson, *The Nouveau Roman and the Poetics of Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 98.

²⁴ The conventions of realism depended on the understanding that language was transparent, that the word presented the object in all its immediate fullness. Stephen Heath argues that one of the characteristics of the new novelists is a writing that deconstructs "the 'innocence' of realism." Heath (1972), p. 22. Language in other words, is "denatured", torn away from its naturalising supports that assume representation to be unproblematic.

ture and language. These crises both called for and produced an entirely different construction of the subject. Yet it is important not to forget that structuralism in part defined itself as a response to and critique of existentialism.

In an interview in 1980, Kristeva argued that existentialism was a deeply flawed movement that failed to recognise the existence of the unconscious and its logic, and so was unable to deal with both the formal aspects of language, and the experimental writing of the avant-garde.²⁵ Sartrean thought in its naive assumptions about cause and effect in history was locked into its time, unable to think meaning - or the subject - as a process in language. For Kristeva, Sartre's "religion of reason" excluded the question of form and its relation to the way in which meaning was produced. If the subject is continually caught up in generative, textual processes, existentialism's subject who must choose to authenticate himself was an anachronism.²⁶ Appeals to "ethics" and "humanism" gave it only a superficial charisma, because it did not engage itself with these crucial realities of form and process.

To discover why Sartrean existentialism eventually became so objectionable, we need to turn to its history, and to the way in which it treated the notion of the subject. However misguided the figure of the existential hero now appears, there were sound reasons for its power to grip popular mythology. Not surprisingly, Sartre achieved the same sort of notoriety in the forties that was later to accompany Lacanian psychoanalysis. Sherry Turkle's account of popularised versions of Lacan's lectures sweeping Paris and decorating its bourgeois cocktail parties seems to be remarkably close to the way in which popular existentialism had been assimilated three decades earlier. However, Mark Poster's study of existentialism

²⁵ Meisel (1984), pp. 128-130.

²⁶ Kristeva was not the only one to regard existentialism as passé. Michèle le Doeuff also argued that Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist analyses were "a trifle obsolete". See her "Simone de Beauvoir and Existentialism", trans. Colin Gordon, *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 2, (Summer 1980), p. 278. She has however recently revised her opinion somewhat in *Hipparchia's Choice*, see especially pp. 135-209.

and Marxism affirms that Sartre's writing, whether the philosophical *Being and Nothingness* (1943) or the more accessible novels and plays, struck a chord among many people from the naive to the intellectually sophisticated and, moreover, achieved international repute.²⁷

Lacan's notoriety stemmed chiefly from his unorthodox method of teaching and practising psychoanalysis. In contrast, the profiles of Sartre and de Beauvoir, true to their support for an active engagement in politics and culture, were constructed in a less pedagogical milieu. As if fashioning personas from those they gave to characters in their novels, the two appeared forever in the public gaze, usually engaged in some serious interchange as café habitués, receiving official recognition for their writing or else protesting over the Algerian war.²⁸ Indeed it is ironical that the man who spent much of his writing time shoring up the subject against the hostility of the Other (he had written in *No Exit* the words, "Hell is other people",) led such a visibly staged life.

But the immediate appeal of Sartre's version of existentialism was not so much due to its public exposure as to the way it treated the question of the freedom of being's existence, a matter that impinged universally on all. The historical subject of *Being and Nothingness* is free, irrespective of class, race or gender, inasmuch as he is compelled to construct himself through continuously exercising choice of one value over another. Arising during a time when men and women were often faced with life or death decisions, existentialism offered a powerful rationalisation for active involvement in history. The notion of the existential hero at odds with his environment and confronting the implacable forces of history by acting according to his singular choices reflected and also helped to gener-

²⁷ Mark Poster, *Existential Marxism in Postwar France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975). See especially pp. 72-108.

²⁸ There is the classic photograph of Sartre and de Beauvoir who are to be observed reading *Le Figaro* "dans un café italien" reproduced on the cover of Pascal Ory and Jean-Francois Sirinelli's *Les Intellectuels en France, de l'Affaire Dreyfus à nos jours* (Paris: Armand Collin, 1986).

ate the partisan-like ethos that attached itself, for instance, to Resistance fighters during the war.

The world for Sartre was neither fully discoverable through perception nor reducible to appearances or meanings. He therefore rejected phenomenology and idealism, but equally believed that both knowledge and subjective feelings can make sense of reality for subjects. "Husserl", he commented, "has restored to things their horror and their charm."²⁹ Thus Sartre's subject in action, in contrast to the subject that would be formulated by structuralists and the new novelists, is still closely tied to humanism. While Sartre claimed he was not a rationalist and defined "freedom" as that which exists in a dialectical relationship to what is given, individual choice and intention still occupied the centre of his conceptual universe. One likely consequence of privileging human agency in this way is that we are then compelled to set up the object of our intentions as that which can be mastered. At first glance quite distinct from the Lacanian "Other," Sartre's Other was simply an object to be manipulated or conquered by the subject. The struggle of self and other to an extent resembled Hegel's dialectic of Master and Slave, as Simone de Beauvoir acknowledged when she observed in the introduction to *The Second Sex* that "following Hegel, we find in consciousness itself a fundamental hostility towards every other consciousness; the subject can be posed only in being opposed - he sets himself up as the essential, as opposed to the inessential, the object."³⁰ The attention Kristeva gives to existentialism is due then, to these assumptions that "freedom" and "necessity" are brought to bear on a more or less intact, if unhappy subject.

²⁹ "Intentionality", quoted in M. Hammond, J. Howarth & R. Keat, *Understanding Phenomenology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 99.

³⁰ *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (London: Pan Books, 1988), p. 17. For an introduction to Hegel's dialectics and its reception in France, see Poster (1975), pp. 3-35. For an alternative account of how and when Hegel was read in France, see Michael Kelly (1982), especially p. 56, where Kelly argues that Poster's hostility to Marxism causes him to skimp on assigning significance to the manner in which Hegel was studied in late nineteenth and early twentieth century France. For a further account of Hegel's entry into contemporary French discourse, consult Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth Century France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).

Kristeva by contrast wished to depose the mastering subject by forcing him to confront his unacknowledged debt to the body: to the estranging work of affects and the unconscious. The walls that Sartre erected between self and other, the individual and society, remained impenetrable, although they were soon to be challenged by structuralism's leading exponent: Claude Lévi-Strauss. Even as Sartre was looked up to as an intellectual leader in the early sixties by the new Left Student movement, Lévi-Strauss published his critique of existentialism in the final chapter of *The Savage Mind*.³¹

2.3. II. the disappearance of man

The Savage Mind contains an illuminating appraisal of Sartre's *Critique de la raison dialectique*; hardly surprising when we consider that Lévi-Strauss believed the ultimate goal of the human sciences was "not to constitute, but to dissolve man."³² Existentialism had a very different view of the world and man's place in it. Where Sartre posited an alienated human being at the centre, structural anthropology attempted to go beyond empiricism to discover universal laws. These laws would unite with the natural sciences in regarding "life as a function of inert matter".³³ By the same token, universal categories to which the mental life of the individual submitted made the impersonal collective (the group, the race, humankind,) the superior term.

Lévi-Strauss used the term "man" as a generalised, abstract expression. Because the focus of his interest lay in formalising universal structures, the subject came to be seen as an impediment to analytic research. In addition, this new approach would supersede the existentialist assumption that man is diametrically opposed to the world. The real protagonist for Lévi-Strauss was not man and his world, but language. Accordingly we cannot speak of a history of primitive man because

³¹ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *La Pensée Sauvage* (1962). Translated as *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).

³² Lévi-Strauss (1966), p. 247.

³³ Lévi-Strauss (1966), pp. 247-8.

the Western observer interprets and classifies in the light of his own conception of time. Choosing some events to quantify excludes others, and thus it becomes impossible under these conditions to properly speak of temporality or the subject, since both terms rest on an ethnocentric set of selection criteria. If the analyst accepts the formative role of language however, he consigns the positions of a subject and its objects in history to a museum of imaginary relics. "Linguistics", wrote Lévi-Strauss, "thus presents us with a dialectical and totalising entity but one outside (or beneath) consciousness and will. Language, an unreflecting totalisation, is human reason which has its reasons and of which man knows nothing."³⁴ The force of these remarks is directed against the existentialist vision of history with thinking, judging man at the centre.

Quite clearly, Lévi-Strauss sought the demise of humanism. He believed that it was not the subject who spoke and created meaning, but language that spoke *through us*. Structuralism therefore attempted to go beyond the cogito by assuming that reality was not to be discovered at this level but through the unconscious mind. From this point of view, we are all irrevocably constituted by the unconscious, universal and atemporal binary structures of mind and language. Which is why we read in *The Savage Mind* that the empiricism implicit in the anthropologist's collection of data was an illusion, since reality did not exist either at the level of surface structures or within the consciousness of the subject.

Yet in a different sense this kind of formalism brought its own problems. It was assumed, notes Poster, that the "scientist vanished in his own knowledge", that through the procedures of science, structuralism was able to speak from a position outside the consciousness, and hence exterior to the object of investigation.³⁵ To speak of language as a closed system implied that the one

³⁴ Lévi-Strauss (1966), p. 252.

³⁵ Poster (1975), p. 314.

who spoke was still somehow set apart from, or above, the object that he spoke about. Furthermore *The Savage Mind* actually rested on an assumption that privileged the primitive. Lévi-Strauss too couldn't avoid constructing his own mythology, and like his contemporaries in ethnology, he too reverted to a form of data collection to verify his results, all the while claiming its confirmation of the universal structures of the mind. Only by relocating the subject within language as the subject of an unmasterable *process* was Kristeva able to introduce an alternative position that appeared to avoid the most limiting features of both existentialism and structuralism. She thus reinterpreted the unconscious and its relation to language as a destabilising process that completely evaded the recuperative gestures of structuralism. Needless to say, challenging the genderless subject presupposed by Sartre and Lévi-Strauss was not apparent in Kristeva's anti-structuralist writing which as she later claimed, had aimed for an impersonal enunciation. It was the critique against rationalism in its many forms that was most important for her, and it is probably because of this critique that she aligned herself more profoundly with the experimental writing of the avant-garde than the discourse of social and political theory.

2. 3. III. structuralism, writing, Roland Barthes

Roland Barthes was one of Kristeva's doctoral examiners, and admitted during her defence that he had learnt much from her, particularly her emphasis on the generative processes responsible for the production of signs. Certainly the lyrical play of seemingly endless textual surfaces that we discover in *Le plaisir du texte* and *Image-Music-Text* reflects the contact with Derrida, Kristeva and Lacan, and has earned Barthes a great deal of admiration, even notoriety.³⁶ In almost all of his work he exposed the myth of the "natural". What we have been led to regard as universal and natural in culture is in fact, often particular and arbitrary. Barthes offered a new and lucid critical language as the means to demystify the

³⁶ *Le Plaisir du texte* (Paris: Seuil, 1973); translated by Richard Miller as *The Pleasure of the Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975). *Image-Music-Text*, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1984). Barthes uses Kristeva's term from *Séméiotiké, signifiante*, throughout this collection of essays. See Stephen Heath's introduction, pp. 10-11.

habitual. Criticism, if it accepted his call for a radical re-casting, would then be in a position to bypass the conventional grammar of reading in favour of an "eccentric" and "revolutionarily justified" language aimed at "casting off the natural right of the old texts."³⁷ Bourgeois language was mimetic; revolutionary language by contrast is characterised by *difference*, for "the revolution is essentially a form, that of the final difference, *the difference which has no resemblance*."³⁸

To be able to link revolution and literature through homologous forms was one of the characteristics of Barthes that attracted Kristeva and which she developed in *Revolution in Poetic Language*. Indeed, both semioticians regarded literature as the privileged "symptom of the ideological tearings in the social fabric" (*Desire*: 93) precisely because it registered and engendered social change. Barthes spent little time discussing the subject in abstract terms, but from its earliest days his writing offered an implicit critique of the humanist subject of bourgeois culture through dissecting the linguistic and cultural habits of his own society.

Less well-known outside of Europe, Barthes' earlier structuralist pieces were more demanding and often quite technical. Together with the politically engaged *Le degré zéro de l'écriture* and *Mythologies*, it was these early works that Kristeva would have acquainted herself with when she began studying in Paris.³⁹ The chief focus of his wrath in *Le degré zéro* was the bourgeois realist writers of the nineteenth century and by extension, bourgeois culture in general. Realist topography with its insistence on the filled-in landscape where all details presented themselves to the observer's ineluctable stare had no means of dealing with the subliminal, the elliptical. By revealing the "natural" as an illusory construction, *l'écriture* for Barthes functioned as an acknowledgement of

³⁷ Roland Barthes, "The Refusal to Inherit" in *Sollers Writer*, trans. Philip Thody (London: Athlone Press, 1987), p. 71.

³⁸ Barthes (1987), p. 73.

³⁹ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (London: Paladin, 1973).

historicity. The writer was implicated in society, but *l'écriture* permitted him to both judge and commit himself to that society.

"The Great Family of Man," an essay in *Mythologies*, adopted a similar critique of the natural.⁴⁰ An exhibition of photographs called "The Family of Man" arrived in Paris from America. Barthes speculated on the way this particular bourgeois myth is constructed. He argued that the process of naturalising humanity took place in two phases: first, exotic differences between cultures are stressed; then an appeal is made to the universality which underlies difference. Dissolving strangeness by sentimentalising the experience of human emotions was a powerful way, Barthes contended, to forget the different social and historical contexts out of which lives are lived. The biggest myth of all was the manner in which the photographic exhibition had represented "Nature itself as historical."⁴¹ This seemingly ideal truth that the bourgeois world view was totalising, must be refuted. "Man" has been made into a universal subject by bourgeois culture whereas in reality our conceptions of men and women are shaped by particular historical contexts, said Barthes. Surely here was the implicit suggestion that "man" as subject is an anaphora - an empty category which a culture fills with its time-bound prescriptions.

Barthes' early book-length venture into structuralism entitled *Elements of Semiology* was published in 1964.⁴² His text had little to say about the subject, but it reflected what Kristeva expressed as Barthes' "capacity to make formalism . . . extremely appealing." ("MMH": 266) Assuming, but equally pressing beyond the mechanistic tendencies of structuralism, Barthes' early efforts to destabilise bourgeois discourse can be seen as anticipating the more ambitious but critical analyses of language that were to emerge not long after, and also echoed the work

⁴⁰ See Barthes (1972), pp. 100-102.

⁴¹ Barthes (1972), p. 101.

⁴² Translated by Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978).

of a French linguist Emile Benveniste, who had been publishing on the double nature of language and its effect on the speaking subject for many years.

2. 3. IV. Benveniste and the subject of enunciation

It was the linguist Benveniste, Kristeva's professor at the Collège de France, whose work on the subject of discourse acted as a stimulus to her own understanding of the subject in language. Kristeva has often acknowledged her debt to Benveniste, since it was his work that developed the distinction between conversational discourse and reported discourse. In each case, Benveniste argued, the subject was constructed differently, his presence or absence marked by various linguistic devices. Rather than viewing language as an enclosed system of signs, a generative grammar spoken by a Cartesian subject, Benveniste saw language as the product of a speaking subject who was defined relationally and who constructed himself around the polarity "I/You".⁴³

Kristeva naturally took the identity of the subject beyond this symmetrical duality, probably in the process refining her definition of Benveniste in accordance with her own preconceptions, because for all intents and purposes Benveniste did see language as a binary system of signs. Perhaps his definition of the subject however, gave his understanding of system more fluidity, enabling the potentially translinguistic entity of the Kristevan subject-in-process to emerge. Thus it is to Benveniste that we must turn to establish precisely his conception of discourse.

Benveniste was the first to introduce Saussurian linguistics to France. Saussure had understood language to be a privileged system of signs among other sign systems and had named the scientific study of signs *semiology*. In contrast to the later American generative grammar which took as its most basic unit the sentence and its "deep structures," semiology began with the word as the fundamen-

⁴³ In Meisel (1984), pp. 130-31.

tal unit of analysis. One of the most notorious of Saussure's concepts was the emphasis of structure over process, of synchronic system over diachronic change through time.⁴⁴

This emphasis was not to suggest that Benveniste ignored the human aspect of language. On the contrary, he held language to be a privileged sign system that mediated between man's inner and outer realities; a dialogical process that set the boundaries for the representation of reality through intersubjective communication :

Thus the situation inherent in the practice of language, namely that of exchange and dialogue, confers a double function on the act of discourse: for the speaker it represents reality, for the hearer it recreates that reality. This makes language the very instrument of intersubjective communication.⁴⁵

In his essay "The Correlations of Tense in the French Verb,"⁴⁶ Benveniste set out the distinctions between the subject of story or history, whose intent was to efface itself and to eliminate any connections with the world of fictional construction, and the subject of discourse, whose intentions were to do precisely the opposite. "Story" or history took place in a past that was finished and where events seemed to narrate themselves, thus bearing witness to their authenticity. The subject was apparently co-incidental: the act of speaking and the events of narration were made to coincide while the subject floated above the text, confirming its authenticity by his absence. Discourse though, assumed a speaker in relation to a hearer who would modify his discourse according to the assumptions of this other. It concerned a past event made present through the structures of speech; a

⁴⁴ See Benveniste's responses to semiology for example, in "Recent Trends in General Linguistics", from *Journal de Psychologie*, (Jan.-June 1954), pp. 139ff., reprinted in *Problems in General Linguistics*, transl. M.E. Meek (Coral Gables, Florida: University of Miami Press, 1971). For an even earlier essay on this question, see in the same volume, "The Nature of the Linguistic Sign", pp. 43ff., first published in *Acta Linguistica*, No. 1, (Copenhagen, 1939), pp. 23-9. Consult also Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, ed. C. Bally, S. Sechehauge, trans. W. Baskin (New York: McGraw Hill, 1966).

⁴⁵ Benveniste (1971), p. 22.

⁴⁶ Benveniste (1971), pp. 205-215.

situation of enunciation (*l'énonciation*) which was privileged over the content of enunciation, the *énoncé*. The subject of discourse was therefore consciously split between the act of speech and the narrative events.

As Benveniste noted, narration of the historical events was detached from our present by effacing any sense of autobiographical construction. Now the implications of a conception of language as double, that is, as both denotative and connotative, are considerable, and they were employed directly by structuralist thought and reformed and set off-centre by post-structuralism. One of the first implications of these conclusions is, paradoxically, the strengthening of the attack on the subject which had become non-coincidental. (Feminism, with a different project in mind, also employed the critique of the coincidental subject, but as will be detailed later, labelled this subject "male".)

Kristeva found Benveniste's work to be a fruitful stimulus to her own, and undoubtedly she derived some of her emphases from him, although she also departed from what still remained the "transcendental ego" of discourse. Even while Benveniste spoke of the need to relate language to culture and of the need to see its translinguistic functions, the privileged object of analysis remained the discourse of the subject, where the "other" existed, but only as a hypothetical entity. The "outside" of discourse (particularly change as process) was in this model unable to be related dialectically to the subject of discourse, which remained hermetically sealed within its own syntax. It was due in part to the influence of Lacan that Kristeva was able to set Benveniste's subject in motion by meshing discursive structures with the formation of sexual identity through differential linguistic structures. This then appeared to open language up to the most basic, originating, and estranging movements of creation and destruction - or as Freud would have it, to the incessant interaction between the pleasure principle and something that sought its own extinction.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ See Freud's essay, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle", SE XIII, pp. 7-64.

2. 3. V. desire, lack and the name of the Father

It was chiefly Lacan's re-reading of Freud that opened the way for Kristeva to make formalism more mobile. The unconscious and its generative processes in language were *the* privileged concepts that radically differentiated the new readings of Freud from movements like existentialism. In fact this gap in post-war philosophy seems unbreachable, and the one point which Kristeva kept returning to is that "Sartre couldn't think the unconscious".⁴⁸

However if important intellectual critiques distanced themselves from Sartrian thought, the medical profession in the late sixties was still locked into a fundamentally conservative, holistic view of consciousness and the subject. I think we can see a parallel here between Sartre's assumptions about the subject who may through his own actions be master of his destiny, and the "rationalism, realism and individualism" that characterised psychiatry in the 1960's.⁴⁹ More than any other discipline, psychoanalysis received scant attention from the medical establishment until around the time of the May '68 revolution. Writes Sherry Turkle, "Even in the 1950's and 1960's French psychiatry was decidedly anti-psychoanalytic in its reliance on moral authority, rational argumentation, and the invocation of shared social principles".⁵⁰ In other words, traditional psychiatric practice was curative. It strove to restore its patients to the wholeness of full health. If their pain derived from a lack of being, then through a successful diagnosis patients' emptiness could be filled with a socially sanctioned ego.⁵¹ According to this world view, the subject of language was in healthy command of his "I". The author and his text were as one and they were so because they assumed the mediation of an equally autonomous ego.

⁴⁸ Meisel (1984), p. 129. Here Kristeva agrees with Meisel's formulation.

⁴⁹ Sherry Turkle, *Psychoanalytic Politics: Freud's French Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1978), p. 37.

⁵⁰ Turkle (1978), p. 37.

⁵¹ I must confess in passing that I do not share the same arrogant objection to the principle of good curative practice that Kristeva and others entertained in these early days.

On May 9 1957, Jacques Lacan presented to an audience of philosophy students a paper entitled "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious." What transpired to be a sustained attack on the Cartesian cogito, the place from where philosophy begins and to which it returns, was staged in the Descartes Amphitheatre of the Sorbonne. We can be sure that Lacan squeezed as much irony and drama from the situation as he could. He hectored, harassed, cajoled, inspired and charmed his way through a blistering indictment of the fundamental assumption that authorises humanism: *cogito ergo sum*. Freud, insisted Lacan, recognised the unthinkable nature of what he had named the unconscious. Rather than serving to bolster the acculturation of the ego, its drives were always towards an Other (primal) scene. Lacan's intention though, was not to embroider a Freudian mythology. He was emphatic that the structures of the unconscious were linguistic.

The unconscious was not a place where incestuous desires were repressed so much as it was the originating site of language. For Lacan, as Sherry Turkle remarked, "*Oedipus is language*".⁵² Freud's myth of the origins of human sexuality gave place to an account of how the child learned to substitute signifiers for his desires. From the time of birth the child was surrounded by the linguistic markings of culture. The earliest pre-Oedipal stage of language development occurred in what Lacan named the "mirror-stage", when somewhere between six and eighteen months the infant acquired an image of itself that was separate from that of its mother. Although these images established a certain kind of elementary identity for the child, they were nevertheless according to Lacan profoundly alienating since they were based on "imaginary" constructions. The sense of our own ego and the expectations of wholeness that arose from this early experience were misleading because they were based on identifications with "others", especially the images of ourselves and our first care-giver. As Turkle

⁵² "Why Are You Here?", *London Review of Books*, Vol. 11, No. 1, (January 5, 1989), p. 3.

writes, "The ego never exists as a coherent entity. From the beginning, it is a composite of false and distorted introjections, so that I and other are inextricably confused in the language of the self."⁵³

But the most important initiation rite for the child was the entry into the world of the symbolic. While foreshadowed at the mirror-stage, this occurred in its most important form at the end of the Oedipal phase, the stage of development that Freud described as occurring when the child became aware of the father's imposition in its own intimate relationship with the mother. One of the functions of invoking the Oedipal myth was to suggest that forbidding incest between parents and children (and especially between mothers and sons) was a primary (and, for Freud, universal) experience. The father intervened in the potentially incestuous scene between mother and child and said "No". This "no" (what Lacan termed *le non du père/le nom du père*) was the vitally constitutive metaphor that underlies all language and culture. For in repressing "the desire for the mother and the desire to be what she most desires" (*le désir de la mère*) the child then gained entry into the order of symbols that alone could substitute, in metaphoric fashion, for its separation from the world of things.

The symbolic order required what Lacan called the "splitting of the subject". To enter language the subject must become a signifier, where the signifier, itself split off from the signified, refers both to the grammatical subject of the *énoncé* and to the speaking subject of the *énonciation* (where this latter is spoken from the place of the Other, or the unconscious). It was the articulation of these differentiated structures through powerfully constitutive figures of speech which gave rise to the definition of the signifier as standing in the place of the subject for another signifier. Thus Lacan's elliptical "I am not, wherever I am the plaything of my thought; I think of what I am where I do not think to think."⁵⁴

⁵³ Turkle (1989), p. 3.

⁵⁴ Lacan (1977), p. 166.

Saussure understood the signifier and the signified as yoked together collaboratively. By implication this meant that the "I" of speech coincided with the "I" of the cogito. Not so, said Lacan: the signifier was not only overdetermined but it followed its own paths of desire, generating endless chains of related signifiers. If the subject can be said to have any identity at all here, it must consist in the gap between the two signifiers which define it relationally. But these signifiers are elusive; always somewhere else when the subject sets out to pin them down through self-reflection and intentioned speech. If the tropes of my discourse represent the drives of another logic of which my consciousness knows nothing, then the notion of the ego as a centred present-to-itself-entity is a fable.

The task of psychoanalysis is therefore to refuse the patient's desire for an ego-centred mythology, to refuse to be the one "who is presumed to know" for the subject.⁵⁵ Instead the analyst must trace the way the figures of displacement and condensation move from one object of desire to the next in an incessant quest to erase the subject's lack of being. The analysis is considered to be at an end when the analysand comes to assent to taking on the desire of the Other "herself". An infinitely more sophisticated version of the "talking cure", Lacanian psychoanalysis has had in retrospect a compelling effect on French intellectuals, both among those desiring the experience of analysis, and in the way Lacan's readings of Freud and linguistics were appropriated in critiques of culture, language and the subject.

To what extent though, does Lacan deal with gendered subjects? Since the regime of the Symbolic is defined as ruled by the Father's "non"/"nom", bearing the Phallus as transcendental signifier, it might be concluded that the subject of the symbolic is male. Clearly, the effect *and* function of the "paternal metaphor"

⁵⁵ See Introduction II by Jacqueline Rose in Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose eds., *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the Ecole Freudienne* (London: Penguin, 1982), pp. 50-51, and see also the final essays translated in the text.

is to privilege representation of what is seen to be the sign of male supremacy (and difference) from women. Taking up this line of thought, Hélène Cixous concludes therefore that the feminine is precisely that which cannot be represented, and equates the very structures of grammar and narrative with a castrating paternalism: "even at the very moment of uttering a sentence we are already seized by a certain kind of masculine desire."⁵⁶

Jacqueline Rose is quick to point out the limitations of such a reading, and draws the distinction in her introduction to *Feminine Sexuality* between being excluded *by* the nature of words (through the phallus), and *from* the nature of words (a feminist interpretation that sets women outside language).⁵⁷ Representation determines how we define and experience sexual identity, and language compels us to privilege the visible even as it fails to satisfy desire: "if Lacan states that the symbolic usage of the phallus stems from its visibility (something for which he was often criticised), it is only in so far as the order of the visible, the apparent, the seeming is the order of his attack."⁵⁸ Thus we can acknowledge Lacan's attempts to deconstruct the paternal metaphor by emphasising both its necessity and its lack. For the figure of the Father is perceived as the missing third term that interrupts the imaginary plenitude of the mother and child dyad, projecting the subject on to the axis of language and desire. So there can be no enculturation, no speech communities without the Father's Law. Equally though, the Law fails to give full compensation for what it takes away. Men and women together experience the lack that founds the social/symbolic contract. To that extent, the Phallus is the supremely fraudulent sign, and so it cannot be taken to affirm the integrity of male superiority.

⁵⁶ Quoted by Nelly Furman, "The Politics of Language: Beyond the Gender Principle?" in Gayle Greene and Coppelia Kahn eds., *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1985), p. 60.

⁵⁷ Mitchell and Rose (1982), p. 49.

⁵⁸ Mitchell and Rose (1982), p. 42.

Nevertheless to a certain degree the subject of the phallic order of signs still assumes a masculine position. The impossibility of insisting that anatomy is only figural, and that it is the *representation* of sexual difference that matters has been well documented (and will be explored further in Chapter Four). As Rose concludes, there is a vulnerability to Lacanian theory which "presupposes the subordination which it is intended to explain."⁵⁹ Women according to this scheme of things *do* have a secondary position in language at the same time as they are faced with a normative account of the development and expression of their sexuality.

For intellectual women there are difficulties in assuming that the order of language is the prerogative of the masculine. Kristevan semiotics is undoubtedly indebted to Lacan, but instead of focussing on the castration complex and its relation to the name of the Father, Kristeva set out on her own path, beginning with a series of speculations as to what pre-linguistic pre-Oedipal experience would be like, and how such a space would present itself in the literary text. The emphasis on a pre-Oedipal semiotic component reflected Kristeva's attempt to split the communicative symbolic order of language and to open it to what for Lacan had been irreversibly repressed in the unconscious: the *jouissance* of the mother. As we shall discover, the semiotic is not the repository of a language for women, but it did represent a challenge to normative experience and as such attempted to subvert paternal authority and the Law. In those days when psychoanalysis was not so apparent however, Kristeva found other more discreet ways to examine the question of gender that philosophy and linguistics had excluded.

2. 4. "The Bounded Text" and its subjects

Kristeva's earliest essays were concerned with two aspects of a critical practice. There was firstly, her ambitious attempt to systematise without being bound by

⁵⁹ Mitchell and Rose (1982), p. 45.

the findings of structuralism. If the science of signs could establish its object as the intersection of "*several semiotic . . . [translinguistic] practices*," (*Desire*: 36) it could break free of the confining aspects of system, all the while assuming its logical framework. Using form to overturn form is a recurring aspect of Kristevan writing. It anticipated the similar manoeuvres of deconstruction, but was to depart from them later in maintaining the unconscious as the privileged generator of "desire in language". Secondly, Kristeva was concerned to discover how a dynamised structure could recast the desiring subject in language. How was social and political discourse maintained within language when the object of linguistics was read as an infinite material process that estranged identity by placing its subject "in process"? What happened to male and female identities when they came into contact with poetic language?

The problem is approached in different ways in Kristeva's work on semiotics where a number of alternative conceptual vocabularies are used. "The Bounded Text", written over 1966 and 1967, is an essay on the genre/gender of narrative at the same time as it offers a critique of the capitalist economy of signs. In this essay Kristeva explained "text" as the privileged site where communicative language (statements in time) intersected with a collection of synchronic utterances (statements "outside" time).

One of the key concepts here was the *ideologeme*, derived from Bakhtin/Medvedev. In *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*, he had defined ideologeme as the ideological values (more specifically those of philosophy and ethics) that structure the novel.⁶⁰ These were not present in the literary text as unassimilated principles, as their ethical content had undergone a transformation that brought them into meaningful relationship with "artistic ideology". On the other hand, neither were ethics and philosophy permitted to

⁶⁰ M. M. Bakhtin, *The Formal Method*, trans. A.J. Wehrle (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 17. Kristeva probably assumed this text was written by M. M. Bakhtin, but current research attributes it to P. N. Medvedev.

lose their "ideological bite", for an ideologeme "brings to the structure of the novel all its extraartistic ideological meaning, all its seriousness, and the fullness of its ideological responsibility."⁶¹ Kristeva used the concept of the *ideologeme* here as a means of making visible the relationships between sexed subjects and the material processes of textual production, the latter being finally responsible for the larger ideological processes that generated the texts of "history" and "society", genre and gender.

The principle focus of this early essay is a study of the novel *Le Petit Jehan de Saintr *, written in 1456 by French warrior, page and teacher Antoine de La Sale.⁶² La Sale's text falls within the period of what is termed the ideologeme of the sign.⁶³ Kristeva maintained that around this time in Europe prevailing discourse was in a period of transition from using the symbol as a guiding metaphor to that of the sign. The symbol always refers back to a transcendent idea or meaning. It is not arbitrary, nor does it entertain contradiction: "within its 'logic' two opposing units are exclusive."⁶⁴ God is implacably other than man; man is opposed to woman. The sign by contrast tends to reify concrete as opposed to transcendent universals. Contradiction and arbitrariness of genre and gender are entertained but only temporarily, as within the trajectory of narrative. Thus man is both opposed to, and "identical" with, woman. The new ideologeme, Kristeva argued, was to persist until the end of the nineteenth century when it began to be challenged by avant-garde and Symbolist texts. Thus the sign's dominion was extensive, a vital mode of production to apprehend. It produced a discourse which determined the social context of sexual difference and legitimated the development of capitalism, drawing literature and sexuality into its orbit by representing them as negotiable commodities with market value. Kristeva used

⁶¹ Bakhtin/Medvedev (1985), p. 22.

⁶² Antoine de la Sale, *L'Hystoyre et plaisante chronicle du Petit Jehan de Saintr  et de la jeune Dame des Belles Cousines* (Paris: Sansot, 1919).

⁶³ Such a conception is rather like Foucault's description of the *epist me* towards the end of the middle ages, halfway between resemblance and reference. See Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973).

⁶⁴ "From Symbol to Sign" in Moi ed. (1986), p. 65.

these formal categories (the ideologeme, intertextuality, the sign/symbol distinction) to test out a theory of semiotics that assumed both the sign and its subject to be internally divided.

If language can be apprehended as a formative material leaving traces of its own construction it is within the subject of narrative that these traces are most visible. When Kristeva speaks of re-evaluating the "bourgeois social text" in the light of writing as production, a new reading of literature emerges that recognises the sign as a *materiality*. Within the text as writing, the sexed subject confirms this opacity of language in that it comes to be fundamentally *ambiguous*.

Today in postmodern texts where production supercedes product we see illustrated the same writerly consciousness which aims to destroy the referential capacities of language. But even as far back as the nineteenth century, the concept of a narrative which disguised its constructed nature by pretending either that it had existence outside time and finite human agency, or that it belonged to an author who ultimately derived his powers from a transcendental authority, began to come under fire in the writing of Mallarmé. Literary discourse in capitalist society valorised realist narrative Kristeva maintained, because it assumed both "books" (hence characters and authors) and language to be marketable (that is, "closed" or "bounded") commodities. The blindspot of the realist mentality was its assumption of a subject that closed on itself, master of its own singular desires. But wherever there is a consciousness of writing as production, there is also a recognition of the gap between process and product, and between the *sujet de l'énonciation* and the *sujet de l'énoncé*. The subject is heterogeneous, crossed and cut up by contradictory desires. And by the time of avant-garde writers like Sollers, texts such as his *H* had marshalled a set of practices that completely overwhelmed the writing subject in a destructive carnival of language games.

"The Bounded Text" is a strategic essay for our purposes in which Kristeva links the inception of writing as production jointly with the evolution of the novel and the appearance of sexual ambivalence by demonstrating how ambiguity and non-contradiction become structuring principles within the trajectory of the novel and its addressees.⁶⁵ The subject of *Le Petit Jehan de Saintr * is the Lady of the Beautiful Cousins whom La Sale introduces through the double-coded message she delivers to the Court and to Saintr , at once positing and denying her love for him. We will recall that a semiotics of the symbol could be expressed as the situation where one entity was identified as "good" and its contrary was correspondingly identified as "evil" but not "good". The semiotics of the sign by contrast, assumed that an entity may be good or evil or both. The former description is expressed in logical terms as a disjunction; the latter, a non-disjunction. In the epic for instance which belongs to a symbolic system of representation, good is opposed to evil, bravery to cowardice, and so on. Antithetic categories are in permanent opposition to each other, producing a black and white morality and usually stereotypical figures.⁶⁶ By comparison, non-disjunction introduces the double into literature, and has the temporary effect of posing an alternative Scene where contraries merge and separate themselves endlessly, delaying the final judgement of ethics and avoiding the imposition of a fixed gendered identity. The character displays a moral ambiguity: for a time we are not permitted to inquire whether he is good or evil simply because he represents both contradictory values at one and the same time. Similarly his tendency towards sexual ambiguity (is he a man or woman? does he love men or women or both?) calls reference into question. Saintr  is homosexual and the Lady's lover; the Lady is lover and Mother, genuine and duplicitous. So sexual identity has no privileged site of utterance and nor does it

⁶⁵ Mark Adriaens terms the genre Kristeva operates with is the "post-epic mock heroic". See his "Ideology and Literary Production: Kristeva's Poetics" in *Semiotics and Dialectics: Ideology and the Text. Vol 5*, in Peter Zima ed., Linguistic and Literary Studies in Eastern Europe (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1981), p. 199.

⁶⁶ According to Adriaens (1981), narrative research discovers non-disjunction to be present in myths and epics as well, which belong to the realm of the symbol (p. 201).

refer to a pre-linguistic reality, but speaks everywhere and with different masks from the body of the text.

This intrusion of duplicity is the characteristic movement of non-disjunctive logic and may be identified everywhere there are utterances with two senses, figures of indeterminate sexuality, ironic citations from other ideologies (the blason, for instance), masks, and all double-dealing. (*Desire*: 43) Non-disjunction is above all infused with carnival. Again, appropriating Bakhtin's sense of the term, Kristeva uses carnival as a term which overturns symbolic (paternal) logic. It is anti-authoritarian and anti-hierarchical and draws its celebratory energies from a relativising of contraries: life and death, joy and sorrow, fidelity and promiscuity. These conventionally exclusive categories lose their mutual hostility and embrace: kings become fools, maids step into whore's shoes, nobles dance with men of dubious repute. The antithetic mode of carnival represents as well a more fundamental splitting: the novelistic speech act divides into two, and La Sale appears as both "masculine" and "feminine": author of the script and an actor within it. In the same way as the individual in carnival loses his stabilising centre and becomes subject of the spectacle and object of the game, the narrator becomes the enunciating subject and subject of the enunciation at one and the same time. Here is Kristeva:

The author-actor's utterance unfolds, divides, and faces in two directions: first, towards a referential utterance, *narration* - the speech assumed by he who inscribes himself as actor-author; and second, toward textual premises, *citation* - speech attributed to an other and whose authority he who inscribes himself as actor-author acknowledges. (*Desire*: 45)

It is the constant movement within the subject between one who speaks and one who is spoken that structures the narrative. Because Saintr  and the Lady are objects of exchange within society, the sign is offered analogously as ambivalent exchange object. The two characters become negotiable sexually double commodi-

ties marked, like the sign, with its ambivalent inscriptions. Clearly, where the text proves to be the meeting place of utterances, no one formal statement can be taken as representative of meaning, truth, or identity. The author's point of view is severely relativised through the juxtaposition of the utterances of author and actor, and between the wider discoveries of narration and citation. In fact, the space of novelistic enunciation is ultimately empty, a "hollow, unrepresentable space" whose trajectory juxtaposes "two types of utterances with their *different* and *irreducible* 'subjects'". (*Desire*: 46,47) Given the drift of Kristeva's reading of identity, it becomes impossible to speak in one's own voice, or to maintain an explicitly ideological discourse on sexual difference. The figure of the double both refers and does not refer to a referent, and resists all moves to enclose it behind the walls of a self-present subject.

Despite the sign's ambivalence however, it finally submits to the closures of a mimetic economy; likewise La Sale's characters submit to the author's final judgement. We would have to acknowledge that all literary production up until the end of the nineteenth century at least ultimately returned its illusory asymbolic logic to its Author. Novelistic utterance, then, curtails textual productivity and pulls the shades on empty space; God marks the sign's boundaries and returns its wanderings to synthetic meaning. Just as Benveniste had concluded a decade earlier, the splitting of the subject of enunciation marks the difference between "story" and "discourse". *Jehan de Saintré* is a mediation between writing as an "infinite concatenation" of discourse and "literature" (*Desire*: 56) as a closed narrative. La Sale as writing subject is split between the two divisions of actor and author which he maintains simultaneously. But the close of this narrative witnesses more than the author who claims full speech once again. For in retrospect the manner of Saintré's final confession and appeals set the seal on all writing as a wholly intentional work. As Kristeva concluded, the "fact remains nevertheless that it is bounded, born dead: what terminates it structurally are the bounded functions of the sign's ideologeme,

which the narrative repeats with variation. What bounds it compositionally and as cultural artifact is the expliciting of the narrative as a written text." (*Desire*: 57) Ambivalence and non-disjunction have their place, albeit a limited one. The unfaithful Lady who initiates Saintr  is finally judged and punished, which amounts to an authorial condemnation of ambiguity and treacherous femininity. At the level of narrative structure her condemnation is implicit in the "bounded text" [*le texte clos*] where signification submits to and closes on the unequivocal triumph of virtue over vice, masculine (or the neutral subject) over the feminine. The sign therefore erects a guardrail⁶⁷ around a reified subject and text divested of their material qualities.

Luce Irigaray has called for "a revolution in thought and ethics" in order that "the work of sexual difference . . . [may] take place".⁶⁸ Can we consider aspects of "The Bounded Text" as potentially favourable to her "revolution"? The pivotal emphasis Kristeva places on the Lady of the Beautiful Cousins is at first glance of great interest to feminists inspired by Irigaray. Not only does the analysis show how the Lady is controlled and manipulated as an object of exchange by the prevailing economic system; it also attempts to subvert that system (or at least to inscribe its contradictions and limits) by revealing the Lady's fundamental ambiguity. This puts the figure of woman *outside* a culture and economy controlled by men and recalls Irigaray's well-known critique of a male economy which reduces women to the same circulatory role as "signs, goods, currency"; a critique that asks, "What if the 'goods' refused to go to market? What if they maintained among themselves another kind of trade?"⁶⁹

⁶⁷ *Des garde-fous*, the term given to the role of the formal composition of the text in restraining a complete loss of meaning. On other occasions in Kristeva, the term is used to signify the part played by politics in railing off group identity from anarchy or social upheaval. See *RPL*, p. 209.

⁶⁸ "Sexual Difference", trans. Se n Hand, in *Moi* ed. (1987), p. 119.

⁶⁹ From "Des marchandises entre elles" in *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Minuit, 1977), an extract of which has been published as "When the Goods Get Together", trans. Claudia Reeder, in Marks and de Courtivron eds. (1981). This quotation, p. 110.

What we may usefully derive from Kristeva's reading at this point is the recognition that woman's mystification rests simultaneously upon her exclusion from all forms of power and the correspondingly rigid and singular identity which she is expected to bear: "Within such an ideologeme, the idealization of woman (of the Other) signifies the refusal of a society to constitute itself through the recognition of the *differential* but *nonhierarchizing* status of opposed groups." (*Desire*: 50) If sexual difference between subjects was to be dismantled and internalised within the subject, the battle between the sexes for mastery may prove redundant. This is what I take Kristeva to be suggesting here. While for Irigaray such a strategy would risk valorising a neutral (and therefore "male") hypertextual realm, we can alternatively regard "The Bounded Text" as an early attempt to formalise a system of thought that subverts the thinkable - sexual identity included.

To construct new terminology or to create new contexts for old terminology (the book as "product", the sign as non-disjunctive) is therefore part of an estranging praxis: transgressive thought in action. Moreover, linking the many appearances of ambiguity in the novelistic speech act to the emergence of the capitalist system is in itself an ambitious and innovative project. One of its implications is that the concept of the psychological nature of *character* and the ego-centred subject similarly find their origins in a capitalist economy. Paring away the supports of a psychologised and gender specific subject is therefore linked to a critique of capitalism as a mode of production, a critique that the political disturbances of 1968 were to intensify and displace.

2. 5. May '68: "every view of things that is not strange is false"

For two months in 1968 history as process threatened to overwhelm some of the most sacred and powerful of French institutions. What had been the object of analysis among intellectuals came to life, shaking collective and individual identity to its foundations. A crisis of authority gave place to a crisis within the sub-

ject, for the '68 revolution shifted the scene of debate from the classroom to the streets, and in this levelling kind of ambience, challenged tightly-guarded ego boundaries and habitual patterns of interaction.

On May 3 1968 the Sorbonne was closed for the first time in its history as students confronted university authorities. The following Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday, violent battles erupted in the Latin Quarter, especially along the boulevard St. Germain. There were scenes of barricades, burning cars, thousands of people massed together, makeshift hospitals. On Monday May 13 students occupied the Sorbonne. These dates marked the official beginning of *le printemps rouge*, an upheaval in contemporary French history whose precipitous, volcanic mix of violence and celebration was probably quite unprecedented. When Kristeva came to speak some years later of her own involvement in the uprisings, she emphasised their potential theoretical appeal:

During the anarchic eruptions of May '68 in which we participated around the clock, we kept from the beginning a foot on the barricades (that romantic intoxication corresponded to our erotic rhythms and our thoughts, which had broken with convention) and an eye in search of something that could ensure cultural transmission, something in the party that could be useful (to us). ("MMH": 273)

"Our own gratification," she wrote, "was essentially the development and appreciation of our work." What possible effects could the '68 revolution have had on theory? Was its purpose merely to supply a glamourised vocabulary of violence and dissolution, or did it fundamentally transform Kristeva's investment in semiotics?

Although students initiated and often seemed to have the highest profile during the events of May, the disturbances quickly spread throughout France, affecting many other sectors of the population. On May 14 workers at the Sud-Aviation plant near Nantes in western France occupied their factory; Renault factories across the country came under worker control, as well as various industries in

Normandy, Paris, and Lyons.⁷⁰ On Saturday May 18 coal mines stopped production and public transportation in Paris and other major cities came to a halt. Gas and electrical workers took over their plants. Later, postal and cross-channel services, department store service, television transmission, other civil services and teaching were limited or ceased altogether. By May 22 over 9 million workers were on strike. Loose alliances of students, industrial and some agricultural workers (the bulk of farmers did not play an active role in the strikes) co-ordinated activity, but much of the disruption was spontaneous and piece-meal.

The politically threatening nature of May is often passed over by both right and left-wing commentators, but there were times when it seemed that the movement would bring down the government. The Bourse (the Paris Stock Exchange) was set on fire on May 24 and only a lack of central direction, together with opposition from communist party and trade union officials prevented demonstrators from seizing the ministries of Finance and Justice. Five days later, de Gaulle flew to the Rhine to get assurances from 70,000 French troops stationed there that they would assist in the government's defence if necessary. However the nation, urged on in many cases by trade union leaders and the *Parti Communiste Français*, gradually rallied behind the forces of law and order and began returning to work in June. The ensuing general election in July was an overwhelming victory for Gaullists and the Right.

What kind of revolution was May '68? Why did it happen? Despite an absence of the classic causes of revolution such as civil war, a serious economic or political crisis, or external aggression, we know that the vision of an internally harmonious France was a myth: French prosperity during the sixties had been purchased at considerable cost. Clearly, there had been warning signs. The revolutionary events of May didn't appear as "a bolt out of the blue" ["un coup de ton-

⁷⁰ These details are taken from David Caute, *The Year of the Barricades: A Journey Through 1968* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988).

nèrre dans un ciel serein"].⁷¹ Post-war economic reconstruction and modernisation treated the "soutiers" ["deck-hands"] of society with "brutal indifference". When student protest in Paris grew it seemed to provide the necessary catalyst for the expression of wider-held grievances. In this national agitation, "metalworkers from Elbeuf or Calais, peasants from Brittany, workers from Fourmies" were just as involved as their compatriots in Paris.⁷² On balance however, May '68 drew impetus from and left its most powerful marks among the young.

One important factor in the uprising was the nature of the French education system. Cauter tells us that the student population over the previous ten years had jumped from 170,000 to 514,000. Paris alone contained 130,000. Of this number, from one third to one half were regularly failed in every course. There were simply not enough professional openings to meet the demand; nor were entry standards as rigorous as those operating in the United Kingdom and in the United States.⁷³ Students, particularly the marginalised ones, were hostile to an education programme (the Fouchet Plan of 1966) that laid down guidelines for four-year degrees and inferior two year ones leading to lesser jobs in education, industry and administration.

A survey conducted by Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron in 1964 documented the existence of privilege in university institutions in Paris.⁷⁴ In the Ecole Normale Supérieure and the Ecole Polytechnique, 57 percent and 51 percent of students were sons of senior executives and professionals respectively; 26 percent and 15 percent were sons of lower-rank executives. The university system applauded and consecrated privilege, especially among arts students where courses assume a previously acquired familiarity with cultural activities.

⁷¹ Delale et Ragache (1978), p. 9.

⁷² Delale et Ragache (1978), p. 7.

⁷³ For this information see Cauter (1988), pp. 212-3.

⁷⁴ *The Inheritors: French Students and their Relation to Culture*, trans. Richard Nice (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

Naturally the alliance of higher education with the upper classes required masking, and the ideological origin of "personal gifts" which usually belonged only to the well-endowed was never questioned.

We should not lose sight of the fact that the men who produced the "homogenised history of ideas" were all products of elite Parisian schools and their ideas were developed against the backdrop of an increasingly marginalised, disaffected student population. "Downclassing" is the term used by Bourdieu and Passeron to describe what occurs when "*baccalaureat*-holders [are] obliged to take jobs as factory workers or postmen". Bourdieu linked the frustration of lower class educational aspirations to anti-establishment protest. Downclassing or "structural deskilling"

finds expression in unusual forms of struggle, protest, and escapism that the organizations traditionally involved in industrial or political struggle find hard to understand, because something more and other than the worker's "situation" is at issue . . . a whole generation, finding it has been taken for a ride, is inclined to extend to all institutions the mixture of revolt and resentment it feels toward the education system.⁷⁵

This commentary was first published in 1964, and is remarkably prophetic in isolating some of the energy behind the '68 protests that for the main tended to bypass conventional political channels. Moreover, it seems ironical that the elevation of the "marginal" and history as impersonal process that occurred in the writing of the intelligentsia during this period was accompanied by a *real* historical protest among materially marginalised groups who were excluded from those very privileged institutions to which the Parisian intellectuals belonged.

There was a strong sense too that a university education was dehumanising. Old-fashioned rules and firm repression of protests added to the feeling that students were merely cogs in a machine. Nanterre, a campus of the University of

⁷⁵ Bourdieu and Passeron (1979), p. 84.

Paris opened in 1964, saw student protests against overcrowding and repressive dormitory rules in November 1967. Further protest in March 1968 in which the student leader Cohn-Bendit was active led to the *Mouvement de 22 Mars* that demonstrated its opposition to "the capitalist-technocratic university . . . the division of labour and . . . so-called neutral knowledge" and called for "solidarity with the working class".⁷⁶ These protests were by no means restricted to France alone. Similar struggles between students and administrations took place in 1967 and 1968 in New Zealand, Australia, America, Britain, Germany, Spain, Italy, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Japan. Student movements shared similar heroes and their leaders often read the same theoretical writing on revolutionary critique. Che Guevara, Mao and later Ho Chi Minh became cult figures in many countries and Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man*, a best-seller.⁷⁷

All the same in France, representation and memory of the *événements* attributes to them the shattering of an old order. Claude Lefort writes of the way in which people were compelled to "become actors in an unpredictable adventure."⁷⁸ May created a new public space characterised by "intense dialogue":

The quality of this new space, this new field of discussion, was such that individuals who had lacked the competence or authority to speak or act in their own names suddenly improvised a public existence, sought interlocutors who became, in their eyes, substitutes for a universal addressee, and strove to legislate for their own milieu or for all society.⁷⁹

Brought face to face, participants learnt for a while to evaluate the quality of their personal lives and collective experience through spontaneous conversation. The power of the word was nowhere more in evidence. Students at the Ecole des Beaux Arts kept up a stream of posters announcing: "EVERYTHING IS

⁷⁶ Caute (1988), p. 88.

⁷⁷ Popular estimates in France reveal that over the summer Marcuse was read by more than 1 million people. This information from Patrick Combes, *La Littérature et le Mouvement de Mai 68* (Paris: Seghers, 1984), p. 89. All subsequent translations from Combes in the text are my own.

⁷⁸ "1968 Revisited: a French View", trans. Jon Rothschild, *Dissent*, Vol. 35, No. 3, (Summer 1988), p. 341.

⁷⁹ Lefort (1988), p. 342.

POSSIBLE", "THE IMAGINATION TAKES POWER", "TAKE YOUR DESIRES FOR REALITIES", "IT IS FORBIDDEN TO FORBID", "EVERY VIEW OF THINGS THAT IS NOT STRANGE IS FALSE".⁸⁰

Patrick Combes in *La Littérature et le Mouvement de Mai 68* writes of the still powerful cultural trace of the movement of '68 in everyday life and in the popular imaginary. It had entered into the way people spoke of their past and this circulation of ideas about what happened had itself become "un travail idéologique", ideology in action.⁸¹ To Philippe Sollers at the time, the crisis of literature was a "major symptom" of the historical process that May '68 accentuated. It comes as no surprise that the themes of literature and revolution, language and politics, had been under public discussion for some months preceding May. In April *La Nouvelle Critique* organised a colloquia on "Literature and Linguistics" at Cluny with the prominent involvement of members of *Tel Quel*: Julia Kristeva, Philippe Sollers, Jean-Louis Houdebine and Marcelin Pleyne. *Tel Quel* had produced its first issue in 1960 under the editorship of Sollers and over the following decade came to define its practice as enacting a break with institutionalised procedures for reading and writing literature. Avant-garde texts were frequently published, and their work on language became part of the new practice, which united with a desire to work in politics and transform society.⁸² Reporting the Cluny session in *Le Monde*, Raymond Jean wrote of the way Marxism and literary theory were doubled back on themselves; "that of Marxist thought towards a modern theory of literature, that of the new literature towards a scientific and 'revolutionary' practice of writing."⁸³ Instead of focussing on the ideological *content* of literature, what was stressed at the colloquia was how discourse itself was ideological.

⁸⁰ Caute (1988), pp. 221-3, 225.

⁸¹ Combes (1984), p. 9.

⁸² Leon S. Roudiez, "Twelve Points From *Tel Quel*", *L'Esprit Créateur*, Vol. 14, No. 4, (Winter 1974), p. 291.

⁸³ Cited in Combes (1984), p. 28.

On April 24 Sollers was interviewed in the communist *Lettres Françaises*, and set out how a new revolutionary way of understanding literature subverted bourgeois decadence:

First of all, in placing emphasis on the *text*, on its historical determinations and its mode of production; in systematically denouncing the metaphysical valorisation of the concepts of "work" and "author"; in putting into question subjectivity or so-called "objectivity", we have touched the central nerve of the social unconscious in which we live, and, in short, the distribution of symbolic property/propriety.⁸⁴

Tel Quel's rereading of Marx and Lenin thus enabled them to redefine the determining mode of production as textual rather than economic in the classic sense of the word. Under the influence of Althusser, avant-garde writers and critics like Sollers recognised that the new textual or scripted economy enacted by modern literature was on a par with the political economy studied by Marx after his break with humanism. The subject of writing was swept up in the many-levelled processes of the text's economy and lost its singular boundaries. Constantly in the process of becoming, it thereby took part in the dialectics of history. A mature Marxist-Leninist science would assist in a revolutionary reading of literature because it cut across bourgeois idealising which attempts to mystify history in placing "humanism" and "commitment" at the centre of discourse. There was no longer any place for an intentioned work or an identity named "author". By way of illustration, *Tel Quel's* summer '68 issue called for an "advanced theoretical" discourse as the only means to "recognise the process of the class-struggle, which has objectively to be carried on and reactivated."⁸⁵ Presumably according to this logic, through denouncing "metaphysical valorisation" and challenging the conventional understanding of objectivity, the class-struggle could be enacted in a more vital and relevant way.

⁸⁴ Philippe Sollers, quoted in Combes (1984), p. 29.

⁸⁵ Quoted in Keith A. Reader, *Intellectuals and the Left in France Since 1968* (London: Macmillan, 1987), p. 10. See also Sollers's remarks on idealism in Roudiez (1974), p. 303, and Mary Ann Caws, "Tel Quel: Text and Revolution" in *Diacritics*, Vol. 3, No. 1, (Spring 1973), pp. 2-8.

Such an intellectual calling as the one Sollers invoked has Olympian goals, for the very act of critical reading was presumed to be able to cut keenly to the heart ["une percée théorique générale"] of social experience. Rather than a redistribution of property and material goods as Marx had envisaged to be the outcome of a revolution of the proletariat, Sollers claimed for the text the power to redistribute "symbolic property/propriety". I take this to mean that the text's writerly structures take language by storm and subvert its indwelling corporate morality. In a sense of course, the power of the written and spoken word was only too obvious in 1968. As Claude Lefort reminded us, a new field of discussion opened up. A ceaseless supply of posters met Parisians each morning of the events, strangers conversed with each other, professional hierarchies made attempts to engage in self-criticism and innovation: in sum, intellectuals revelled in the revitalising effects that these disturbances had on critical discourse.

Overall, we could probably conclude from the above picture that the sixties got the kind of revolution it deserved. Among intellectuals the decade had been largely preoccupied with discerning the powerful orders of discourse that constituted culture, so it was no wonder that when an uprising occurred in Paris the authority of the word should receive maximum foregrounding. Kristeva's memoir captures some of the exuberance of the events and conversations, and we can sense in similar accounts a genuine break with post-war morality and a strenuous criticism of scientism and technology. The web of discourse that produced and reported on May was in its own limited way clearly subversive. Most crucial to our account was the shattering of what had been conventionally understood as the "political". It is fair to conclude that the end of the sixties witnessed a considerable disillusionment with the reductionism of party politics. During the revolution, the *Parti Communiste Français* and trade unions had played an active role on behalf of law and order. Party programmes and personal involvement seemed incompatible: classic dogmatism had little appeal to people intent on throwing off social and political restrictions on personal expression. In

addition, the state monolith began to discover in the seventies that a new kind of government was required to meet the real challenge from a proliferation of vocal interest groups. Together with theory's challenge to the Master Narratives, there appeared a renewed interest in the revolutionary processes that shaped the *individual's* relation to culture.

Some intellectuals (notably Kristeva and the *Tel Quel* group) while not entirely relinquishing their obligations to Marxism, withdrew in the early seventies from its emphasis on engagement and the search for a "non-mechanistic materialism" that would also be politically constructive. Despite maintaining an interest in Maoism, they turned increasingly to psychoanalysis, which assured them that "society is a crime committed in common" (Freud) or to an anarchism that linked syntax in language with the forces of law and order.⁸⁶ It was during this time that Kristeva's writing moved away from the explicit dialogues with structuralism as a system of forms to focus more explicitly on the nature of the subject. Written over January 1972 to January 1973, Kristeva's doctoral thesis *La Révolution du langage poétique* studied the ways in which poetic language could be considered revolutionary. One of the main props of her argument rested on the assumption that the subject's relation to language was in permanent motion. Constructed through the materiality of the signifying process, the subject was lent by cultural prescriptions a fragile stasis which was splintered and renewed again through the resurgence of this semiotic process in language.

When we speak of the Cartesian subject by contrast, we assume that the subject must be preserved more or less immune to any kind of materiality or process that would undermine the reliability of consciousness. Because it attained to mastery in language through thought, the Cartesian subject "draws its position, its isolation within the signifying process, from the reduction of the negative,

⁸⁶ See for instance, Sollers' statement in *Magazine littéraire* that "Grammar is already a question of the police", quoted in Caws (1973), p. 3.

from the absorption of material discontinuity into affirmation and symbolism - from its abutment against the constraint of state control." (RPL: 94) According to Kristeva, the state had a vested interest in maintaining the security of society's institutions in order to preserve its subjects from the upheavals of "negativity". But if the subject was exposed to the processes of textuality (as defined by Sollers for instance) it became dislocated, estranged; at variance with itself and the status quo. As a result social structures were vulnerable to "radical transformation", and it is in this way that we can call the signifying process revolutionary.

The subject-in-process was not, of course, history's intentional subject. There was no humanist self or personality to what was essentially an engendering structure originating within language. In a glancing recognition to Marx, Kristeva called her subject the "true gravedigger" of imperialism, but this was not because she believed in political agitation by subjects against the aggrandising state. What interested her at the time was a process in language that produced "the *non-subjected man*, the *man-process* who sets ablaze and transforms all laws, including - and perhaps especially - those of signifying structures." (RPL: 105, my emphasis) Yet it is not altogether possible to efface human agency from this formulation. As Kristeva commented herself, from the earliest days "implied in the interweaving of genres and theory there was always an extremely large personal element".⁸⁷ Theory comes to us mediated by the theorist; textual productivity maintains an association with "character" and "psychology". If one of the effects of the uprisings in France had been to push intellectuals to reconsider the nature of "materialism" and "practice" so that ultimately the claims of textuality became ever more extensive, alongside the critique of identity appeared a second seemingly antithetical discourse: feminism. As a female intellectual, how did Kristeva address a movement that largely assumed the expression of female subjectivity to mean a struggle for power and equality on the one hand or a celebration of female difference on the other?

⁸⁷ "The Last Word of this Adventure", with Louise Burchill. *On the Beach*, (1984), p. 23.

Undoubtedly, despite surface appearances, much of her theoretical writing after the rise of feminism following the '68 revolution carried on an implicit dialogue with the "mouvement des femmes". Often hostile to its anthropomorphism, at other times enthusiastically linking woman's alterity with the language of exile and thought, Kristeva's "non-subjected man" retained therefore a connection, however fragile, to the world of experience, presence, and identity.

2. 6. "Les femmes, la moitié du ciel"

In retrospect, one of the most powerful aspects of the '68 revolution was the dramatic focal point it provided for the expression of *difference*. "May" became the locus that sustained a series of challenges to social and political hierarchies. However much the events were represented in the popular press as mass demonstrations, we need to recognise the acting out of a discourse quite subversive to collective assumptions about "truth" and "reality". This was *the* moment in history when the rarefied conversation maintained by the Master Thinkers of the sixties turned and critiqued itself. For if there is no longer any intentioning humanist subject within the historical process, but "history" instead reveals a proliferation of subjectivities, it by the same token challenges the exclusions of these Master Thinkers. "Autocritique" was permissible and encouraged but even so, the relatively homogeneous intellectual community prior to '68 was unable to recognise that its discourse had been founded on the absence of "half the sky".⁸⁸

Making French women visible and empowering their own forms of discourse was perhaps the most fundamental and lasting ultimate effect of May. The intellectual was no longer a universal (male) subject capable of speaking for all or of

⁸⁸ Autocriticism was an important activity for intellectuals in the sixties. Althusser was "encouraged" to offer self-criticism after his publications had offended the Communist party (see Hirsch 1981), and Kristeva deals with the necessity of an analysis that criticises itself in the essays "The Science of the Text" and in "Semiotics: a Critical Science".

assuming that his pronouncements on the productions of culture were views intellectual women would necessarily share. If *le printemps rouge* brought a widespread "crisis in legitimation" home to roost, this crisis was nowhere more piercing than in representations of gender and sexuality. In this final section I wish to place emergent feminist discourse of the time alongside Kristeva's writing on the subject. The silences and exclusions that such a move reveals casts important light on how Kristeva conceived her own research, and makes its relationship to contemporary masculine discourse more problematic. As Barthes would say but in another connection, it "alters the place of things". Inevitably, I am led to ask why there seemed to be such a discrepancy between what Kristeva said directly about women (for the most part relegated to interviews and autobiographical reflections published in the seventies and eighties) and her theoretical writing (which often only implicitly addressed women or tended to represent them in the form of an idea or notion). The emergence of a modern feminism in France was to challenge both idealism and its corollary: that the personal must remain more or less separate from the political and theoretical.

"La fesse, ce n'est pas politique": the sentiment is a truism, and had been affirmed in France by both left and right wing political organisations, however progressive. Politics had always been an essentially masculine activity, and the issues that had traditionally been the preoccupation of women such as birth control were usually regarded as private matters.⁸⁹ If involvement in women's issues had been an extra-party affair, it followed that there were few French women in positions of political power in France. As Claire Duchen wrote, it was still the case that "association with important men was generally women's access-route to prominence".⁹⁰ Even in the new political anti-establishment groups that grew in the United States and Europe from the early sixties onwards (for example, the

⁸⁹ Delale et Ragache (1978), p. 211.

⁹⁰ *Feminism in France: From May '68 to Mitterand* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), p. 7.

American civil rights movement and the British New Left) women played a token role.

What occurred in 1968 was the recognition that for the first time since the war, women played as politically active a role as did men. Initially for most, this involvement did not turn around feminism. Men and women held common causes and worked at ideological critique or industrial action together. Banners such as : "NOUS NE SOMMES PAS DES POUPEES!"; "LES FEMMES ENTRENT EN LUTTE"; "TELE POUR LE MARI: VAISELLE POUR MOI", were in the minority. More representative of the general sentiments was the inscription: "LA BEAUTE EST DANS LA RUE".⁹¹ If any voices were raised demanding equal rights, the general fracas and political manoeuvring quickly stifled them.⁹²

Even the programmes of radical student movements assumed the conjunction of male and female interests. The *Mouvement de 22 Mars* that originated at Nanterre had stressed the importance of students "fighting for their own liberation in the light of their own oppression."⁹³ Student activists were preoccupied with continually realigning theory with practice, where "practice" was taken to mean "personal experience" together with an on-going self-criticism. But this liberation was not usually seen as relating to the question of gender. The books student leaders studied prior to the Revolution if we are to believe Daniel Cohn-Bendit, concerned male heroes: Marx, Bakunin, Althusser, Mao, Guevara, and Henri Lefèbvre.⁹⁴

Women were enfranchised in New Zealand in 1893 and in England after the first world war; women in France were granted the vote by de Gaulle in 1944. Just as equal participation in a joint struggle had earned them "equal participation" in

⁹¹ This information from Delale et Ragache (1978), pp. 163, 211, 212.

⁹² Delale et Ragache (1978), p. 211.

⁹³ Duchon (1986), p. 6.

⁹⁴ Combes (1984), p. 89.

politics, so too the collective activities of men and women over the barricades engendered a new kind of political consciousness. For the women present, it paradoxically offered the opportunity for the growth of a collective "female" voice. While feminism has had a long history in France, it became a public and popular movement following '68. In May the wider coming to consciousness of a whole generation of young people gave birth almost immediately to a whole host of politically critical movements. Duchen termed this a "culture of protest"⁹⁵ that stressed marginal, anarchistic, and revolutionary pressure groups and shunned involvement with trade unionism and party politics.

With access to public speech and critique comes a consciousness of difference. Excluded from collective decision-making processes by custom, women in particular must have found their new exposure to political protest a revolutionary experience. As Carolyn Greenstein Burke remarks, "for many women [it] provided a first political *prise de conscience*."⁹⁶ At the same time there was the growing awareness that political agendas were not neutral documents representing the interests of all. Increasingly, numbers of women perceived their interests as diverging from men's. Male comrades in action when pressed turned out to have distressingly reactionary views on the place of women in politics. Modern French feminism therefore, grew out of the combination of action and disaffection that May produced.⁹⁷

The experiences gained in working for various *gauchiste* sects were immediately transferred to the new groups that met to study and discuss the role of gender in oppression. The movement was fired with the same sort of enthusiasm that

⁹⁵ Duchen (1986), p. 5.

⁹⁶ "Report from Paris: Women's Writing and the Women's Movement", *Signs*, Vol. 3, No. 4, (1978), p. 844.

⁹⁷ Other small organisations of women were functioning before this time, but sporadically, and with no sustained vision. For example, *Polymorphes Perverses*, *Oreilles vertes*, *Mouvement démocratique féminin*. Towards the end of 1967, another small group began meeting under the leadership of Anne Tristan called *FMA: Féminin-Masculin-Avenir*. By 1970, it still had less than 6 members!

prompted Daniel Cohn-Bendit to say during '68 that the "major obstacle" to change had been "exploded", "the myth that no-one could do anything to shake the regime. We've proved that this isn't true."⁹⁸ There was a new awareness of the political nature of private life. From 1969 onwards, groups of university students and intellectual women who were to constitute the base for the new Women's Movement identified their cause alongside the oppressions of colonialism and racism. Some envisaged a violent struggle on a par with the Black American left.⁹⁹ Others who situated themselves on the fringe of the *Parti Socialiste Unifié* or aligned themselves with lesser left-wing political groups pressed for equal pay and opportunities with men, the sharing of house work and child care, and access to free birth-control.

Whatever the kind of radicalism espoused, all women that had met with a *prise de conscience* naturally found themselves subject to a "*prise de parole*".¹⁰⁰ Women's groups universally shared a tremendous desire to make women visible in the spoken discourses of history, politics, and culture. Elaine Marks named three works by women published in 1969 as initiating the first attempt to take hold of words and challenge "male language".¹⁰¹ Joyce Mansour's *Phallus et Momies*, Marguerite Duras' *Détruire dit-elle* and Monique Wittig's *Les Guérillères* represented the angry desire to do away with patriarchal structures and replace them with an alternative language or culture.¹⁰² Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray pioneered a different version of *l'écriture féminine*, exploring new forms of writing that only a feminine voice could produce, forms which were a combination of theoretical dialogue and lyrical celebration. Other writing was less sophisticated but equally energetic. In 1970 the most famous new militant feminist journal was published for the first time. Named *Le Torchon brûle* or

⁹⁸ Quoted from *le Nouvel Observateur*, (May 20, 1968) in Duchén (1986), p. 6.

⁹⁹ Delale et Ragache (1978), p. 211.

¹⁰⁰ Burke (1978), p. 844.

¹⁰¹ As Delale et Ragache put it, "des femmes . . . prennent la parole" (1978), p. 211.

¹⁰² Joyce Mansour, *Phallus et Momies* (La Louvière: Daily Bul); Marguerite Duras, *Détruire dit-elle* (Paris: Editions de Minuit); Monique Wittig, *Les Guérillères* (Paris: Editions de Minuit).

the *Burning Rag*, it was regularly written and edited by a different group of women. Often lacking polish and intellectual sophistication, the indiscriminate mix of personal testimonies, cartoons and anonymous reflection provided a popular forum for a nascent women's liberation movement that put the experience of women at the centre of politics and culture.

But the most visible of all women's organisations in France was the *MLF*. It first received public recognition (and its official name, *le Mouvement de Libération des Femmes*) from the press in August 1970 when Monique Wittig, Christiane Rochefort and other feminists laid a wreath at the tomb of the unknown soldier dedicated to his wife with the words "One man in two is a woman" inscribed on the wreath's ribbons. The protest coincided with a one-day general strike of women in the United States, but its chief target was the French patriarchy. Members of the public were outraged at the violation that had occurred. As Elaine Marks commented on the sacred nature of the tomb: "Located in the center of Paris it signifies patriotism, nationalism, and the masculine virtues of heroism and courage. The Arc de Triomphe is one of the most explicit signs of a French, and, by extension, of a victorious, universal, male order."¹⁰³

Thus the *MLF* became the title for a loose network of radical women's groups that had already existed or that newly formed themselves in the seventies.¹⁰⁴ Despite all the publicity though, these groups were very small. Anne Tristan recalls a meeting for women organised in 1970 at the Rue Descartes which attracted women in their largest numbers since May: there were "at least 30 of us", she wrote.¹⁰⁵ Although the fortnightly meetings held at the Beaux-Arts in the Latin

¹⁰³ Marks and de Courtivron eds. (1981), p. 31.

¹⁰⁴ Some of the groups established at this time included: *psychanalyse et politique*, *les Féministes révolutionnaires*, *le cercle Elizabeth-Dimitriev*, *les Gouines rouges*, *les Groupes de quartier*, *les Groupes de province*, *la Ligue du droit des femmes*, *SOS Femmes*, *les Pétoleuses*. See Dorothy Kaufmann-McCall, "Politics of Difference: the Women's Movement in France from May 1968 to Mitterand" in *Signs*, Vol. 9, No. 2, (1983), p. 283.

¹⁰⁵ Anne Tristan and Annie de Pisan, "Tales from the Women's Movement", trans. Roisin Mallaghan in *Moi* ed. (1987), p. 35.

Quarter were often divided between women representing feminist, Marxist, and psychoanalytical factions, for many present, awareness of male oppression was all-encompassing. Tristan and Annie de Pisan spoke of being "consumed by a visceral revolt born directly out of their own personal experience."¹⁰⁶ Politics was "Men's business for which women always have to pay the price", so they attempted to develop alternative forms of action that emphasised the "life of the human community."¹⁰⁷ The personal became political.¹⁰⁸

In April 1971 *Le Nouvel Observateur* published a manifesto demanding the legal right to free abortions signed by 343 well-known women admitting they had had illegal abortions. That summer there followed the famous march of "les salopes". Since freedom of contraception had been achieved in the 1967 with the passing of the *loi Neuwirth*, the fight for abortion rights became an important focus for women's groups. Simone de Beauvoir served as the first president of *Choisir*, a pro-choice group, and of the *Ligue du droit des femmes*. As well as engaging in reproductive struggles, she participated in action in favour of economic rights (equal opportunity, pay, and childcare) and against physical violence to women. She was also the director of *Nouvelle féministe*, the League's newspaper and editor of the feminist theoretical journal, *Questions féministes*. Author of the classic text *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir became in the seventies a convert to feminism, and her public commitment to the movement lent it considerable clout. While numbers of feminists from a wide range of political positions identified with the more or less essentialist perspectives on women developed by de Beauvoir, an articulate and powerful alternative had meanwhile formed which took as one of its starting points the phallocentrism of Lacanian psychoanalysis.

¹⁰⁶ Tristan and Pisan in Moi ed. (1987), p. 52.

¹⁰⁷ Tristan and Pisan in Moi ed. (1987), p. 53.

¹⁰⁸ The personal was understood to contain an ideological content; the political was "personalised", thus: "We had made use of some quite spectacular strategies, demonstrations, marches, rallies, each one with its own specific character. The burden of oppression had been lifted, unleashing a prodigious vitality and inventiveness. Humour, joy rather, was an integral part of our political activity." Tristan and de Pisan in Moi ed. (1987), p. 66.

psychanalyse et politique was originally part of a women's study group at Vincennes. Their small movement was active in the post '68 years, publishing an article on Women's Liberation in May 1970 in *L'Idiot international*, a left-wing newspaper, and later in *Le torchon brûle. psych et po* (its founding title) was led by Antoinette Fouque, a practising Lacanian psychoanalyst (whose own analyst had been Lacan). It held strongly critical views of feminism. An article in *Le Nouvel Observateur* on the MLF reported Fouque as saying: "Feminists are a bourgeois avant-garde that maintains, in an inverted form, the dominant values . . . Since these women are becoming men, in the end it will only mean a few more men."¹⁰⁹ Feminism was believed by *psych et po* to be "phallic"; the unconscious, "misogynistic".¹¹⁰ Therefore the women's struggle must work within the discourse of psychoanalysis that revealed "Woman" not as de Beauvoir's essentialist "Other", but as absent from language. In a statement of exactly how authentic feminine power is different from masculine, an article from *Le torchon brûle* opposed the "masculine", concerned with representation, names, knowledge, order, abstractions; to "feminine" as a "non-power of the matrix", bodies, pleasure, a space outside the law.¹¹¹

This form of women's liberation that regarded feminism as a relic of the past deliberately refused to identify with some of the more conventional ways of finding a voice that women were developing. In 1973 the group founded *des femmes*, a publishing house that would encourage select, usually women writers. An editorial note added by *des femmes* to the text *Histoire du féminisme français du moyen-âge à nos jours* by Naïte Albistur and Daniel Armogathe in 1977 explained how they had refused to permit the inclusion of a history of their own movement, *psych et po*, since the writing of history was merely the reverse of

¹⁰⁹ "Antoinette Fouque", trans. Elaine Marks in Marks and de Courtivron eds. (1981), p. 117, originally quoted in Nicole Muchnik's "Le MLF c'est toi, c'est moi", *Le Nouvel Observateur*, (September 1973).

¹¹⁰ Kaufmann-Mc Call (1983), p. 285.

¹¹¹ From *Le torchon brûle*, No. 3, (1972), quoted in Duchén (1986), p. 36.

humanism. And humanism ignored *jouissance*, the sexual pleasure of the mother, which was the underlying reason why women, they believed, had been excluded from language.¹¹²

Kristeva was equally concerned with the repression of the figure of "la mère qui jouit", and in 1974 *des femmes* published her book on her experiences in China: *Des Chinoises*.¹¹³ It is ironical that the text which Kristeva was later to repudiate as "awkward" ("MMH": 275) contains some of the most sustained writing by her on the subject of woman. *About Chinese Women* opens with a discussion of the place of women in the Judaeo-Christian world. Traditionally, provided she accept the censure of the Law and submit herself to the Father's castrating rule, a woman would find dignity and respect in society. To submit in this way however, she must repress her materiality and its challenge to the unities of human culture: she may only appear as "bursting with glory on the condition that she submit to the denial, if not the murder, of the body". (ACW: 15) Ultimately she cannot speak of her sexual pleasure because the language of "men" is unable to comprehend it.

For Kristeva as for *psych et po*, "woman" was the name synonymous with exclusion, one which "in monotheistic capitalism, remains on this side of the threshold of repression, voice stilled, body mute, always foreign to the social order." (ACW: 14) Society could only constitute itself on the exclusion of all subversive difference, of which woman was the exemplary figure. According to the logic of this system, she assumed the role of "waste"; she was the lining which didn't appear, but which energised social structure. Here I sense an attempt to find alternative terminology in which to express woman's alterity, her irreducible difference under the present system of Law. As "the hidden work-force in the relationships of production and the language which defines them", (ACW: 14)

¹¹² Humanism is patriarchal because it will "deny, repress, censure, and exploit that inaccessible place, no longer to be avoided, the mother's body." Burke (1978), p. 848.

¹¹³ Translated as *About Chinese Women* by Anita Barrows (New York: Marion Boyars, 1977).

women's eventual liberation would hold out the expectation of completely new social relationships. The phenomenon of the Cultural Revolution fascinated Kristeva, who saw in the new roles taken up by women there a possibility that they may be able to escape the label of "Other" or "absence"; and be both "Other" and the "Same", male and female, at one and the same time.

Like *psych et po* too, Kristeva was hostile to main-line feminism. Although she recognised the need for a time when women explicitly searched for their own identity, she cautioned here against feminists walling themselves up in the inclusive "we" with all its humanist assumptions, since it only ever produces "militant romantics of the final 'cause' . . . theologians of an inverted humanism rather than its iconoclasts." (ACW: 14) In an interview with Josette Féral, she criticised those feminists who ignored joy, desire and sexual difference and who believed that one changed society (and men) solely through changing the relations of production.¹¹⁴ True iconoclasm rested rather on revolutionising the understanding of production, on how "production" is written. This is why for Kristeva feminism was ultimately incapable of grasping the full effects of a revolution in language, because its political orientation produced a "bounded text" that refused to interrogate the movement of its own productivity. As such it encouraged women to take up the very weapons which they had denounced in the old order: mastery of the other and suppression of alterity or difference in the name of group identity.

However while in the same interview she praised groups like *psych et po*, Kristeva's project departed from theirs in its emphasis on theory and political practice. The important issue for her was to be able to "integrate a theory of women into a defined political structure"¹¹⁵ which was not that of programmatic feminism. She was only too aware of the double problematic that haunted all

¹¹⁴ Josette Féral, "China, Women and the Symbolic: an Interview with Julia Kristeva, *Sub-Stance*, No. 13, (1976), pp. 9-18.

¹¹⁵ Féral (1976), p. 15.

women-centred movements: of how to act into history and of how to seize language without being bound by a political movement's inevitable repression of difference. Thus a female intellectual like Kristeva was haunted even to the point of immobility by this contradiction where a woman may be "socialized, even revolutionary, but at the cost of the body; body crying, infatuating, but at the cost of time". (ACW: 15)

What is the way out of this dilemma? Kristeva argued that women must seize a new relation to language. She speculated as to whether what was happening in China would entail a radical rewriting of the symbolic contract, where both men and women may exercise power without appropriating its authority. Her utopian vision began with the classic Lacanian schema of women's marginalised position in the symbolic in order that its authority may remain vested in masculine signifiers of social power and linguistic norms. Psychoanalysis characterised women as inhabiting a body ruled by "impulse", "desire" and "contradiction", and the symbolic on the other hand as a position that excluded contradiction and "body" in order to communicate. The logic of the symbolic rested on the unattainability of male desire: once admit female desire, and the symbolic's system of closure came to pieces, since feminine jouissance was by its very nature *unrepresentable*. Women must therefore be excluded from the visible ownership of power for it to function properly.

Kristeva upheld Lacan at this point, and in *About Chinese Women* commented that women's "separation from power insures that power remains representable, and that it is up to men - fathers, lawmakers - to represent it." (ACW: 200) Salvation lay in being able to deny the representations of both "man" and "God", for if these two ultimate symbols could be rejected, women would be able to dismantle a discourse that assumed social cohesion and stable identity and claim for themselves the privileged figure of the exile. Such an identification with the outsider was possible, Kristeva argued, because it was as language and more

importantly, *for language*, that "man" existed. The inevitable corollary to "man's" existence is the figure of "woman who was never there." A woman had no identity; she existed as a stranger or exile apart from the symbolic and from Being. Therefore a feminist practice to Kristeva began its most effective work when it left goals of equal opportunity, freedom of abortion and contraception behind, and constructed itself as a negativity in relation to the order of being: "It follows that a feminist practice can only be negative, at odds with what already exists so that we may say 'that's not it' and 'that's still not it.'"¹¹⁶ Each time we interrogate her nature our question misses the mark, which is the very nature of the question of woman.

Kristeva's later writing in the seventies is inconsistent in the connection it draws between a subversive, poetic logic and the identity of women. At various points in her texts women's cause is linked to the breaks of the avant-garde and other new forms of discourse, although at times feminists are sharply rebuked for their apparent indifference to avant-garde writing.¹¹⁷ This gap that appeared between Kristeva and feminism as it is conventionally understood widened over time, even though Kristeva herself dated her disillusionment from the time of the trip to China in April/May 1974. ("MMH": 275) In any case, her writing during the seventies became increasingly hostile to feminism, and she looked for other more idiosyncratic ways to discuss the question of the feminine and female identity.

2. 7. Conclusion

¹¹⁶ "Julia Kristeva", trans. Marilyn A. August in Marks and de Courtivron eds. (1981), p. 137. From "La femme ce n'est jamais ça", an interview with *psych et po* in *Tel Quel*, No. 59, (Autumn, 1974).

¹¹⁷ See especially two articles, "Oscillation du 'pouvoir' au 'refus'", in Marks and de Courtivron eds. (1981), pp. 165-7; and "Talking about *Polylogue*" in Moi ed (1987), pp. 110-117. See also Kristeva's preface to "Recherches féminines", *Tel Quel*, No. 74, (Winter 1977), and Domna C. Stanton, "Language and Revolution: the Franco-American Dis-connection" in Hester Eisenstein and Alice Jardine eds., *The Future of Difference* (Boston, Mass: Barnard College Women's Centre, G.K. Hall, 1980), p. 75.

In this second chapter I have addressed the intellectual and cultural context which supported Kristeva when she began work in Paris in the late sixties. I have examined the prevailing discourse of structuralism and attempted to integrate its often quite disparate research by tracing the role of the subject as it appears in structuralist conversations. Kristeva contributed a radically new theory of the speaking subject to these conversations, and even before *Revolution in Poetic Language* was published her research assumed a subject at odds with itself.

I have also been concerned to show the relations between her discourse and the narratives of two significant cultural events in France: the '68 revolution and the subsequent rise of feminism. In the wake of 1968, politically things remained largely unchanged, but to an extent, social discourse had been destroyed and subsequently reconstructed. In 1972 Kristeva's doctoral thesis argued that language has a material potential capable of assailing social norms and subjective boundaries, although she was a good deal more reserved about the nature of the "revolution" that may eventuate. Neither feminism nor the left were regarded as the *origin* of dissent, however. Rather, Kristeva viewed both of these movements as being the visible effects of a more fundamental dissolution of discursive and conceptual structures. Here we see how the traditional thrust of a political revolution has been displaced on to the axis of subjective experience, understood in its most enigmatic sense. Where Marx had envisaged a moment in time where the working class would seize the machinery of power, Kristeva imagined an on-going revolution in language that would make the modern text and its subject the privileged site of historical process.

Moreover, when I come to assess her work in the light of other writing by intellectual women at the time, I am struck by the gap that separates her from them through a refusal to deviate from her primary loyalty, which is to an investigation of the estranging nature of language. Rather than beginning from her own experience as a woman; from hypostasising a "we" disillusioned with

male philosophy as does Irigaray, or a "we" that will write the "body" as does Cixous; Kristeva doggedly pursues the path of "l'étranger(e)". A stranger as much to her sex as to the language in which she has chosen to write, she will be remembered as an intellectual loner who steered a path through the French academies, sometimes apparently at home with a highly speculative, neutral discourse, at others quite obviously uncomfortable with elitist strategies of investigation. It was this discomfort that attracted her to the avant-garde and at times, to seeking out a feminist practice.

When feminism became less attractive as a political option, Kristeva's interest in psychoanalysis led her to introduce the question of femininity into thematised readings of love, melancholy, alienation and abjection. In some respects the increasingly personal content in these later texts made a female voice a good deal easier to discern than in the early writing. But it is precisely to this early writing that we must now turn, for while *Revolution in Poetic Language* pays scant attention to privileging a distinctively female voice, it does reflect a passion for illuminating the obscure, estranging nature of language itself. If there was one quality that distinguished Kristeva from her contemporaries, it was the conviction that the discomfort this obscurity brought to social and sexual identity was most acute in the literary text. Poetic language unsettled the house of being and called its inhabitants to be strangers and exiles to all bounded forms of thought.

PART TWO

READING JULIA KRISTEVA

CHAPTER THREE

"LANGUAGE THE UNKNOWN"

More than any other, the criticism of . . . [Julia Kristeva] conveys the impression of possessing the complexity and the scope of a genuine work of literature, the intricacy of a city which has its avenues, its dead-ends, its underground labyrinths and panoramic lookouts.

With apologies to Paul de Man.

The stranger, the foreigner, thinks he is in control, but he has been precipitated into someone else's dream.

Angela Carter

To open language up to "materiality", to make of it a "work", is "immediately to make oneself a stranger to language." (*Sém*: 7) With these words Julia Kristeva reminds us that that function as social beings we most take for granted - speech - bears a radical alterity which returns in literature to mock our certitude and give body to our dreams. Language is the Unknown that lies just beyond our line of vision. It is the new sublime, overpowering and mastering us in the same way Africa and the Americas awed the colonial explorers. How can we come to terms with this strange unhomely place which gives us speech and then changes the rules of the game, dissolving "us" in the process? In this chapter I will scrutinise Kristeva's early writing on language and semiotics, especially the text *Revolution in Poetic Language*, from the point of view of a landscape of writing.¹ The persona of the female voyager will be the protagonist who negotiates this

¹ Derrida in "Freud and the Scene of Writing" uses the same expression, but his sense is of a "lithography before words" that is "nonlinguistic" and "alogical". See *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), especially pp. 196-231. I am just as interested in describing a landscape through "verbal images" which would then submit, to some extent at least, to a "philosophy of presence".

landscape, and although the figure recalls and underlines Kristeva's identification with the term, the reader is also represented as a (female) voyager. Such a merging of identities is deliberate, although supplemented by moments when the reader draws back from her object and makes a more distanced observation. From this shifting perspective I shall examine the estranging characteristics attributed to language, their effects on the reader, and I shall conclude with an assessment of the text's subject of enunciation and its implications for women who are intellectuals.

3. 1. "Ce pays n'exista pas"

If semiotics has shown us that every realm is structured like a language, it may equally be true that language takes on the same configurations as a realm. Again, if we may only approach this unknown object through denotative discourse, it is to mimesis we must turn when attempting to delineate its properties. Yet Kristeva tells us in *Revolution in Poetic Language* that the science which proceeds by enumeration and description addresses a corpse. The moribund nature of contemporary linguistics is for her all too apparent in its determination to treat language as an object that has no "verticality" or history. Linguistics, in claiming a position of transcendence in relation to its object, has denied language its strangeness, its intransigent body, and Kristeva's privileging of a revolutionary poetics reflects an attempt to re-locate the study of language in a denatured place whose oblique coordinates take the resisting reader to the limits of her imagination.

A place for everything and everything in its place: such, according to Kristeva, has been the passion and proclivity of a dominant tradition of Western thought:

Our philosophies of language, embodiments of the Idea, are nothing more than the thoughts of archivists, archaeologists, and necrophiliacs. Fascinated by the remains of a process which is partly discursive, they substitute this fetish for what actually produced it. Egypt, Babylon,

Mycenae: we see their pyramids, their carved tablets, and fragmented codes in the discourse of our contemporaries, and think that by codifying them we can possess them. (RPL: 13)

Phenomenology, essentialism, idealism, - in different ways these modes of thought dreamt that the subject could be Master of meaning through exhaustively representing the object. They read the text as a recumbent, hermetically sealed body but closed their eyes to that enigmatic remnant, the *opaque* body, that meaning could never address. Linguistics too has tamed and domesticated language in fetishistic structures. More simply, language has acquired a *home*, a comfortable and orderly "mansion of presence".² Kristeva on the other hand, is at pains to demonstrate that while there may be a place for everything, not everything is at home in its place. What she attempts then, is to "turn the house upside down" ["sens dessus-dessous"] (RLP: 615) so that what once were familiar modes of habitation become estranged and estranging *places*.

In his illuminating study of intimate spaces, Gaston Bachelard links the creative space of poetic daydreaming with the comforts and intimacies of home. We warm our houses, our "first universe", with memory and imagination, and it is this solitary activity that nutures being - being at home in the self, *being* at home with its dreams. The house shelters us from a hostile exterior for it "thrusts aside contingencies . . . [and] its councils of continuity are unceasing. Without it, man would be a dispersed being."³ Bachelard names the study of these felicitous spaces "topophilia": that which seeks "to determine the human value of the sorts of space that may be grasped, that may be defended against the adverse forces, the space we love."⁴ Following Bachelard, a close and disciplined reading of this place becomes "topoanalysis", "the systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives".⁵ Actually, any poetic image whether intimate or

² Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, introduction to *Of Grammatology*, Jacques Derrida, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1976), p. xli.

³ Bachelard (1969), p. 7.

⁴ Bachelard (1969), p. xxxi.

⁵ Bachelard (1969), p. 8.

adverse, evokes a topos. It forms a cluster of associations and related images that take up *room* from which the reader will configure a place.

With its emphasis on the pleasures of intimacy and enclosure though, Bachelard's expression is perhaps too limiting, despite its sensitivity to the psychological effects of space on the subject. In order to indicate the persistent links between textual space, exile and "exteriority", and more importantly, between inside and outside structures of dwelling, I prefer the term "topography". Topography brings the outdoors inside to invest the site of the text with figures from the natural world. But how can we justify using a term that presupposes a distinction between inside and outside, and that draws on mimesis to represent a landscape or dwelling? Isn't it just another kind of fetishism that in making the object familiar, kills language dead? Derrida alludes to this very difficulty when he examines the problems of representing a topography in *Writing and Difference*.⁶ "Freud and the Scene of Writing" informs us that language has repressed its own constructed nature and passed off representation as the servant of consciousness and presence. If we are to accept deconstruction's analysis of language as writing (and in this thesis I intend to make use of the terms of post-structuralism without considering myself bound by them), we must equally accept that difference is interior to a space or concept, and does not exist purely as its exterior, for when Derrida speaks of the return of the repressed, he means that presence and singular identity are threatened from *within*. In which case all we can ever retain of any landscape or dwelling is a topography of traces. Despite the fact that a deconstruction of presence implies a distorted image though, Derrida also maintains that we cannot do without the energies of representation. Nor can we avoid referring to a topography, or to an exterior for that matter, even if it must be written under erasure. And so when he comes to discuss Freud's categories of neurones, he argues that they are represented according to a topographical description which as "external space, that is, familiar and

⁶ Jacques Derrida (1978) See especially "Freud and the Scene of Writing", pp. 196-231.

constituted space", is unable to contain them, although thought about them must still remain firmly tied to topography.⁷ Conventional notions of spacing are here simultaneously rendered as necessary and denied by grammatology. All texts therefore, alongside the problematising of representation, continue to produce topographical effects: they have a landscape that can be *read*.

To some extent in keeping with Derrida's line of argument, Kristeva's readings of language assume that society maintains a "signifying architecture,"⁸ where the image of an inhabited dwelling that represents our social existence as speaking beings is both visible and demolished through the signifying practices of the text. Accordingly, we will name the study of the textual landscape reproduced in this chapter a "topography of estrangement"; a strategy that undermines and deforms the comforting familiarity of intimate space. For Kristeva, a society's signifying architecture is neither straightforward nor conventional; to restore alterity to discourse implies a distortion of the image so that it will slash at the very foundations of our social edifice.⁹ An important aspect of this chapter will be to study the estranging effects of alterity on socially approved building practices: what kind of a place would this rumpus in the house produce? What are the effects when a new verticality is restored to language? How does Kristeva conceptualise this unknown object, and what *affects* are subsequently produced in her texts? Is this object a "home"? A comforting place to which we can return again and again? Does it support day dreams and longings for security and delight, like Bachelard's images of shelter? Is it a space of pleasure? In what sense, if any, is it nurturing and maternal? Does it fascinate us and draw us in? Just what exactly is this realm of language that, as Mallarmé has said, doesn't exist?

⁷ Derrida (1978), p. 207.

⁸ The wording here is on p. 69 of *RLP*. (The English translation on p. 70 of *RPL* uses "signifying edifice".)

⁹ The term used for "slash" here is "en écharpe". From "Pratique signifiante et mode de production" in Julia Kristeva et al eds., *La traversée des signes* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), p. 25. See also "Sujet dans le langage et pratique politique", *Tel Quel*, No. 58, (Summer 1974), p. 23.

"Nous sommes tous *embarqués*," Kristeva has one of her characters observe in her first novel, *Les Samourais*. (LS: 22) Likewise *Revolution in Poetic Language* constantly invites us to take part in a journey. Kristeva creates a subject who is always in motion, eager to depart for an unknown destination or on the way to a strange place which is familiar yet distorted, like our own country seen in a dream. This place is far away and the journey hazardous, but the prospect of travel fills the intrepid voyager with an intense curiosity since there is something profoundly risky about the invitation that summons us to embark on "a passage to the outer *boundaries* of the subject and society." (RPL: 17) Like the heroes of mythology and history who set off on similar epic journeys, we identify with the challenge to venture into the unknown. For Kristeva's text is both epic and travelogue: a guide to an uncharted country - Language - and a celebration of the romance of the epic, where heroes set out on impossible quests and return; disfigured, estranged, but triumphant.

Few capture this fascination for an unnameable region better than Stéphane Mallarmé. Not surprisingly, Mallarmé's writing deeply influenced Kristeva's own, and *Revolution in Poetic Language* constantly alludes to his work. Reading his "Brise marine" with its evocative sense of imminent departure, its "vocabulary of motion",¹⁰ I find reflected there one of the most powerful dreams of Kristeva's text: the desire to see the domestic scene disfigured by an ephemeral and distant place:

La chair est triste, hélas! et j'ai lu tous les livres.
Fuir! là-bas fuir! Je sens que des oiseaux sont ivre
D'être parmi l'écume inconnue et les cieux!
Rien, ni les vieux jardins reflétés par les yeux
Ne retiendra ce coeur qui dans la mer se trempe
O nuits! ni la clarté déserte de ma lampe
Sur le vide papier que la blancheur défend
Et ni la jeune femme allaitant son enfant.

¹⁰ Virginia La Charité, *The Dynamics of Space: Mallarmé's Un Coup De Dés Jamais N'Abolira le Hasard* (Lexington: French Forum Publishers, 1987), p. 16.

Je partirai! Steamer balançant ta mâture,
Lève l'ancre pour une exotique nature!

Un Ennui, désolé par les cruels espoirs,
Croit encore à l'adieu suprême des mouchoirs!
Et, peut-être, les mâts, invitant les orages
Sont-ils de ceux qu'un vent penche sur les naufrages
Perdus, sans mâts, sans mâts, ni fertiles îlots. . .
Mais, ô mon coeur, entends le chant des matelots!

[The flesh is sad. Books are so many words.
To run away! that way! I can feel birds
reeling through unknown spray, drunk with the skies!
Nothing, not old gardens mirrored in eyes
Will hold this heart, plunging into the sea
O nights! nor yet my lamp that emptily
Lights the blank paper in its white stronghold
Nor the young woman as she feeds her child.
I'll go! Steamer with swaying masts, break loose,
Weigh anchor for some distant paradise!

An Apathy whose hopes have soured to griefs
Still trusts the last farewell of handkerchiefs!
Maybe the masts, calling up storms, are like
Those which a wind will drive towards a wreck -
Lost, with no masts, no islands ripe for sowing . . .
But hear, my heart, the song the sailors sing!]¹¹

At the most general of levels, a reading of Mallarmé's poem shows us that it concerns a person full of ennui who looks longingly in his mind's eye at the scene of ships departing for some exotic port of call. He is captivated at the prospect of loss: loss of home comforts and domestic relationships, loss of bodily limits as he imagines himself to be a bird "ivre/ D'être parmi l'écume inconnue et les cieux!" ["Reeling through unknown spray, drunk with the skies".] More compelling than the risks of shipwreck and barren islands, even than the threat

¹¹ *Mallarmé: The Poems*, a bilingual edition trans. Keith Bosley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), pp. 90-91. Where possible Mallarmé will be quoted in the original, with an English translation included in the text where that is considered essential.

of death, is the song of the sailors: "Mais ô mon coeur, entend le chant des matelots!" ["But hear, my heart, the song the sailors sing!"]

"Brise marine" was written in 1865, and it draws on a certain kind of colonial spirit of travel, exploration and adventure, where the intense and cloistered demands of late nineteenth century bourgeois France discovered an escape-valve in the figure of the steamer, waiting to "Lève l'ancre pour une exotique nature!" ["weigh anchor for some distant paradise".] The paradise is as far removed from Europe as possible - Africa, India, the Caribbean perhaps, anywhere in fact that lies beyond the torpid romance of those "vieux jardins reflétés par les yeux". Mediating these rites of passage between body and world, inside and outside, home and place, is language, which in Mallarmé habitually produced a text of displacement and dislocation.¹² "Nothing" holds the speaker's heart, the paper is "vide" [blank], and the country of his desire does not exist except through the imprint of words as "swaying masts" that "break loose" from their "white stronghold."

"Brise marine" creates a fictive space which affords the poet a relative freedom to explore the links between words and the imagination, an exploration that satisfies his desire to escape from the material limits of existence. If the flesh is sad, it is because "all the books have been read" - they have no new secrets to give up; their novelties are exhausted. Alongside this intellectual crisis is the presence of the young woman nursing her child who equally fails to please. Unwilling to be soothed and comforted by her, the speaker yearns for the ultimate "l'adieu suprême des mouchoirs" ["farewell of handkerchiefs"] that will allow him to leave the domestic scene with its familiar lamplight and empty page for somewhere exotic. In "Brise marine" we read how home and the intimacies of the maternal space have quite lost their appeal and must be abandoned in favour of an unknown place with no familiar landmarks or securities save the endless

¹² La Charité (1987), p. 16.

prospect of shipwreck and storms. Risking death and the dissolution of paradise, shipwreck ["les naufrages"] is that fragile borderline state of loss which is the true habitat of language from which true creativity emerges.

Kristeva is not a poet, and reads as heavy-handed and ponderous after the resonance of a line from Mallarmé, although there is something in the force of her images which acknowledges similar inclinations. She shares with him the poet's desire to lose himself and his identity through an overwhelmingly estranging experience, represented to us in "Brise marine" as a voyage with an exotic destination. In search of the meaning of this experience then, Kristeva likewise makes preparations to weigh anchor for a distant place. She too desires to be an intrepid voyager who watches as the blank *vide* of the paper transforms itself before her eyes into white canvas straining at the mast under storm. But what journeys were possible in the 1960's and 70's? What imaginary constellations could late twentieth century discourse open up to subjects with a lust for adventure? The experience of travel is one of seeing new things, of departing from the old and familiar, of returning and realising that nothing can ever be the same again. The seasoned traveller acknowledges that the journey alters one beyond recognition, and that this perpetual altering is one of the most fundamental realities of life and language. To produce a meditation on desire, loss, and the transforming power of the imagination, Mallarmé could thus draw on rich associations implicit in the colonial vocabulary while departing from them. For Kristeva writing a century later but equally fascinated with the mysteries of language and the void, the resonances evoked by a sea-voyage were less convincing.

If colonialism has by the mid-twentieth century become a fading reality so that its images of territorial conquest and exploration now no longer have the authority to move us, then the critical writer may choose to transfer his aggressive, adventurous instincts to the terrain of language instead. Mallarmé had been able to re-fract his preoccupation with language through the prism of a world on the brink

of imperial expansion.¹³ A new vision inhabits Kristeva's writing: an imperialism that henceforth finds its expression in the unfolding of a textual "New World" - writing and the subject of discourse. Paradise will never be regained on earth, nor is its radiance even momentarily recreated through Art, but perhaps its disfigured traces may be outlined in the unknown country of language.

A ransacked "house"; a journey that ends in "shipwreck"; a place that doesn't exist: with Kristeva these three configurations together comprise a *topography* of "elsewhere" - impossible modes of dwelling that disperse being even as they reflect a curious fascination with its former home. As we have seen, one of the few contemporary thinkers to oppose this permanent dispersal of identity was Bachelard, who in contrast to Kristeva regarded the modes of elsewhere as fertile places that nourished being. He conceived of the margins of existence as sustaining the imagination, as a felicitous place to which the daydreamer journeyed and from which he returned, his consciousness revitalised and enlarged: "Art . . . is an increase of life, a sort of competition that stimulates our consciousness and keeps it from becoming somnolent . . . With poetry, the imagination takes its place on the margin, exactly where the function of unreality comes to charm or to disturb - always to awaken - the sleeping being lost in its automatisms."¹⁴ Since the prime function of poetic space was to nourish the creative image, being's dis-ease was only temporary, its function to ward off the rigor mortis of habit. The image with Bachelard then, called the dreamer to life.

Kristeva also employs the image of sleep as a sign of indifference to life, but with altogether different results. She impatiently likens the naivety of modern linguistics to a helpless analyst "listening to the narrative of a sleeping body - a body in repose". (RPL: 13) Because she considered that linguistics repressed vital gen-

¹³ See A.A. Boahen, "New Trends and Processes in Africa in the Nineteenth Century" in J. F. A de Ajaji ed., *General History of Africa VI: Africa in the Nineteenth Century until the 1880's* (Oxford: Unesco & Heinemann, 1989), pp. 40-63.

¹⁴ Bachelard (1969), pp. xxix, xxxi.

erative processes that structured bodies and subjects in capitalist society, she regarded the scientific study of language as "the testimony of a withdrawn body"; (RPL: 16) a dreaming body "withdrawn from its socio-historical imbrication, removed from direct experience". (RPL: 13) But whereas Bachelard housed the creative imagination in a space of intimacy and ultimate calm, Kristeva brings the dreamer to life in a strange and often hostile place where we experience on the one hand the terrifying emptiness of the *vide* and on the other, an incessant agitation: the biological body's rush towards extinction. We discover with Kristevan semiotics that the subject has been deprived of all the comforting supports that affirm presence and identity, and instead we find ourselves in an inhospitable, turbulent place.

Ultimately the female voyager fails to gain ascendancy over this landscape. Angela Carter reminds us that the stranger who thinks she is in control has actually been precipitated into someone else's dream. As readers, part of that sense of helplessness arises from a lack of distance from the object where it is never *our* turn to speak. Part also comes from a suspicion that despite awakening our longing for adventure, Kristeva has so imprisoned Language within a conceptually remote form that it disavows the most intrepid voyager's demands for intimacy.

Now the discoveries we make as readers come from more than our own imaginative response to *themes* of estrangement. I would argue that *style*, including the very shape of words on the page, supplements and underwrites the complexities of intellectual argument. In Kristeva, style dislocates the reader's sense of position and at its most successful, leaves her feeling quite bereft. For style produces an affective response as well as an intellectual one. It too dislocates conventional architecture, estranging familiar objects and making homely places unrecognisable. To acquaint ourselves therefore more precisely with this place as it is reflected in Kristeva's early writing on language, I will now

turn to a study of its characteristics as they construct what I have named a "landscape of writing". This will include close readings of expressions and thematics of "place"; a topology of the page; syntactic and semantic displacements; the figure of the hinge; the "thetic"; and the ritual of "house-breaking". Each of these categories seems to me to designate a particular facet of the signifying architecture of Kristeva's work on semiotics; each functions to create a unique textual landscape which bears psychological as well as thematic effects for the reader. If at the close of our exposition we discover that a rudimentary dictionary has been sketched out, it is because an obsessive desire to name and demarcate territories and arguments forms an important aspect of the texts under study. If we also discover that the figure of the female intellectual seems very remote from all this, we would be both correct and misguided. Clearly, the subject of enunciation here has only the most distant of connections with the ego of experience "outside" the text. One rarely if ever hears the "unmediated" voice of a woman speaking. Kristeva's conceptualising soars skywards towards an indefinite horizon. For all its restoration of affect to language, her thought seems driven by an anxiety that femininity must submit to a rigorous cross-examination and finally, control, by Language. Often illuminating moments of "epiphany" within the text still leave the impression that they are achieved at the cost of a female voice. On the other hand as I hope to illustrate at various points throughout the chapter, there is ambiguity in even the most impersonal of Kristeva's texts that undoubtedly indicates the subject's passionate relation with her identity. In fact, it is this ambiguity, I will argue, that saves her writing from both triumphant mastery and theoretical psychosis.

3. 1. I. expressions and thematics of place

Throughout *Revolution in Poetic Language* the notion of place is posited as an outrage to representation. Unwilling to preserve a sacred dwelling for poetic language, Kristeva sites this revolutionary space "far from the realm of 'discourse' and 'art'". (RPL: 17) It "passes beyond" (RPL: 101) conventional structures to the

"outer boundaries" of experience, (*RPL*: 17) to an "other scene", (*RPL*: 27) "another horizon", (*RPL*: 32) where identity and presence are absent or disfigured.¹⁵ A similar bizarre landscape arises out of *Séméiotiké*. The space of poetic language renders signification impossible: it is an "empty relation" deprived of entities, (*Sém*: 95) a place beyond the "bars of rationality" that puts into play an "impersonal" movement without spectator or actor.¹⁶ (*Sém*: 91) Not content with the surface layers of meaning in language, the text of poetic language "excavates a vertical in the surface of the word" (*Sém*: 9) and discovers there a "corridor" (*Sém*: 287) opening on to a "vast expanse of emptiness." (*Sém*: 275) Searching for a place to ground herself, the reader finds such a gesture officially declared out of bounds. There is, she discovers, no privileged overview, no panoramic landscape dutifully unfolding in front of her gaze. Like landforms enveloped in fog or seen through the clouded surface of a mirror, the outlines of this new mind-scape are frustratingly evanescent.

Kristeva argues that its space is virtually impossible to name or measure because it is "exactly that which cannot be thought within the whole conceptual system that grounds the contemporary mind-set", (*Sém*: 24) but of course this reasoning is true only in a limited sense. To fail to be able to see beyond that mindset implies denying the effectivity of mimesis, that is, of the power of language to represent new conceptualisations. Clearly our language-bound condition is such that any place which cannot be thought according to a certain historical conception of reality still never entirely escapes phenomenology's mimetic constraints. The

¹⁵ It exists as an "elsewhere", a "place", a "crossroad", "an intersection", "an impossible unity"; (p. 118) "a no man's land"; (p. 120) a "specific space which is corporeal and biological"; (p. 123) "an outside that is never definitively separate" but equally "the most radical exteriority"; (p. 148) "the place of an untenable contradiction which only a limited number of subjects can reach"; (p. 155) the "simultaneous existence of the *boundary* (which is the One) and the a-reasonable, a-relative, a-mediating *crossing* of that boundary"; (p. 159) "the place where an always absent subject is produced"; (p. 167) "a signifying space"; (p. 170) "an empty place . . . the empty site of a process." (p. 210) All of the above quotations are from *RPL*.

¹⁶ This movement is one in which "work no longer represents any value, does not yet intend any statement, has no meaning, a scene on which it is a question of the relationship between a body and an expenditure." (*Sém*: 88) *Volume* joins itself to and subsequently distorts *surface*: "The genotext adds volume to the surface of the phenotext", (*Sém*: 287) and the signifier takes on a laminated, ["feuilleté"] (*Sém*: 16) multi-layered aspect.

moment a new terminology enters discourse, the subject of language sets about making it a comfortable home through naturalising its strangeness. Even writing which plays over vast spaces of emptiness is vulnerable to the reader's domesticating imagination which attempts to house it in a topography that can be *represented*. Conceptualising such a place is a laborious uncertain task, but not impossible. Indeed like Descartes' subject who drew the certainty of existence from the certainty that he doubted his existence, the reader is aware of a growing psychological response in the form of overwhelming bewilderment and uncertainty. And so there is a sense in which our estrangement is the response to the positing of an object, even if the manner of its positing momentarily confounds us.

In this first uncertain moment of perception when everything other is alien and hostile to us, we find ourselves in an unfamiliar realm that constantly frustrates the search for stable perceptions. Borges is one of the contemporary writers to give this estranged and estranging space a topography and an affect. Here is what he has to say:

In the palace I imperfectly explored, the architecture lacked any . . . finality. It abounded in dead-end corridors, high unattainable windows, portentous doors which led to a cell or pit, incredible inverted stairways whose steps and balustrades hung downwards. Other stairways, clinging airily to the side of the monumental wall, would die without leading anywhere, after making two or three turns in the lofty darkness of the cupolas . . . ¹⁷

In the passage above the landscape once more seems like something out of a dream. The subject contemplating the scene is fascinated, yet disorientated. His sense of space is shaken to the foundations - conventional architecture has no place in "The Immortal", and exploring dead-end corridors and "unattainable" windows and doors suggests that they have not been built for human subjects. Borges's narrator does not encounter a single person in his wanderings through

¹⁷ Jorge Luis Borges, "The Immortal", in Donald Yates and James E. Irby, eds., *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings* (New York: New Directions, 1964), pp. 110-111.

the city: there is no-one at home, only the observer. Dwarfed by incomprehensible architectonics, he loses his sense of himself. The City of The Immortals is a dead landscape, its stillness uncanny - a "vast expanse of emptiness", perhaps. This sense of purposeless quietude or frustrated movement that so disturbs the reader is equally present in Kristeva's texts, particularly in the essays in *Séméiotiké* which number among her most inaccessible theoretically.

Revolution in Poetic Language also locates the space of poetic language on the same distant horizon, but its predominant expressions, by contrast, are those of motion and violence. A new textual practice involves "exploding" and "shattering" discourse; it "escapes the . . . hold of", "refuses to identify with", "exhausts ideological institutions"; (RPL: 15) it "bursts, pierces, deforms, reforms, and transforms", (RPL: 103) it tears "the veil of representation" (RPL: 103) and leads to "decentering . . . cutting through . . . [and] opening" (RPL: 30) discourse to "plural and heterogeneous universes." (RPL: 14) Such a violent textual practice is offered as the necessary complement to stasis. In contrast to incessant motion, stasis without motion implies the finality of death or the fixity of the ego's identity. So for the subject to resist being thus immobilised, he must acquiesce to the material processes of the text; but this is a costly investment, Kristeva argues.

The subject who attempts to understand and to practise the new textuality is in for a difficult time. Exposed to "impossible dangers" in leaving the family shelter and in "dissolving the buffer of reality", he risks the "violent crucible" of "mobile discontinuity". His revolutionary practice produces "landslides", sets off "explosions", and gambles with death. Reduced to the puny shadow of an observer watching some primitive landscape in constant upheaval, the (female) voyager is led to believe through the sheer energy of Kristeva's vocabulary that she is witness to the most archaic forces of creation and destruction ever unleashed. Drawn into the strange universe of *Revolution in Poetic Language*, she is left breathless and numbed by its pulverizing rhetoric which constantly

throws up alienating images.

In actual fact however, the text sets out neither to delineate nor reflect an "outside" distinguishable from an "inside". As we have seen earlier, two of the most fundamental concepts in philosophy, outside and inside, assume that a permanent separation structures the relation between subject and object. Philosophy has grounded the subject of inquiry on a distinction between "here" and "there"; between "this world" and "another place". The subject could achieve mastery of himself and his objects through reflection, provided this separation between entities be maintained. Since Derrida, these distinctions have been rhetorically dismantled by such figures as the "trace", the "hinge", *différance* and "writing", which introduce discontinuity within the very structures which had sought to exclude internal difference by expelling it to a second term ("outside", "there", "another place"). Derrida's readings were always highly abstract, and his analyses of subjectivity related less to specific problems in linguistics and psychoanalysis than to speculative philosophy. Thus he defines this breakdown of presence as "spacing"; "always the unperceived, the nonpresent, and the nonconscious . . . *the dead time* within the presence of the living present."¹⁸

Intent on explaining how the subject comes to language, Kristeva then takes up deconstruction's readings of meaning and subjectivity and addresses them to the subject of discourse and his relation to the Other (the unconscious). Her criticism of grammatology was that it ignored subjectivity, social practice, and *jouissance*: in short, the dynamic interplay of the drives. But she found Derrida's deconstruction of presence to be more useful, because it enabled her to discover that linguistics assumed a phenomenology of presence in the shape of the transcendental ego. Linguistics and the social structure in general she argues, is regulated by laws which assume a subject at home with himself, at home in his

¹⁸ Derrida (1976), p. 68.

speech, who closes the door on dead time. The ability of language to "mean" rests in the first instance on an ego separate from an object, and then in the reduplication of this separation projected in linguistic structures. In turn, language itself is underwritten by the Absolute Ideal, the Logos. But perhaps, Kristeva reasoned, the processes responsible for the separation of subject and object are not as clear cut as we imagine. If what Derrida had named as dead time could be given a provisional identity in the form of biological drives and primary processes, then alterity could be shown to have always already inhabited the subject through the place of the unconscious. Thus the subject never fully separates from his objects and is never fully at home with himself. The real thrust of Kristeva's architectonics, therefore, is to bring difference (as strangeness) indoors, so that language is simultaneously undermined and embodied from within.

With this procedure, we can see that the linear (and oppositional) relationship of subject/addressee ("ego" and "you") presupposed by conventional linguistics is displaced through the addition of a third term: the text as "stranger", (*Sém*: 181) which we can understand as a metaphor not for a transcendent entity, but for the unconscious. By such means the fixed opposition between inside and outside presupposed by linguistics is now set free from its enclosures. If we have previously been accustomed to reading the text as a division between subject and addressee on the one hand and between signifier and signified on the other, the ambivalent logic of poetic language which adds a third term to all binary couples, blurs and multiplies their divisions so that no singular identity can possibly be maintained except through subterfuge. Indeed, in *Revolution in Poetic Language* the phenomenological subject of enunciation and its objects are shown to be constructions that have turned a blind eye to their formation through the biological drives, which Kristeva defines as energy flows inhabiting a place driven by "permanent scission" and destruction. And it is in essence these inexhaustible generating processes that she regards as having transposed

themselves on to the linear plane of communicative language and ransacked the house. The text's distinctive relationship to space thus comes to reflect its revolutionary character. Whereas a metaphysics of presence had assumed that language received the impulse for transformation from without (from divine intervention, the imagination, Art, Truth, or Knowledge), semiotics insisted that the boundaries of language are infinite - and infinitely renewable - from the inside. *Spacing*, the movement from one system of meaning (or from one entity, place, discourse,) to another, now must carry the burden of transformation that a form of transcendence or exteriority once did. Spacing as kinesis or gestural energy is the process that will refresh language and thought. Its motion is rooted in the continual movements of the drives, and in this way Kristeva is able to suggest that an ultimately unknowable exterior: biology or unreconstructed matter, when interiorised by the subject, radicalises the nature of being.

The journey on which the reader is invited then, is a voyage to the interior, "a descent into the most archaic stage of [the subject's] positing", (*RPL*: 83) which culminates in the figure of the "chora". Representing a key moment in *Revolution in Poetic Language*, the topos of the chora illustrates Kristeva's view of the simultaneous destruction and renewal of language and its subject. It is a place of blinding flashes of energy, punctuating the surrounding darkness with an abrupt, obscure illumination. Despite all attempts not to give the chora the role of first cause in a negative cosmology, it is a generative term connoting a primitive form of "place", "space" or "motion" that has been borrowed from Plato's *Timaeus*.¹⁹ Consequently, in order to avoid lending the chora an ontology and thus an essential existence which would assume all the paraphernalia of a distinguishable form and content, inside and outside, Kristeva suggests that it is the abject pre-object, and refers to Plato's comments on its "anti-metaphysical" nature: "apprehended without the senses by a sort of bastard reasoning . . . This, indeed, is that which we look upon as in a dream and say that

¹⁹ Refer *RPL*, pp. 25-30, and consult Kristeva's footnotes 12-14 in *RPL*, pp. 239-40.

anything that is must needs be *in some place and occupy some room*."²⁰

Kristeva's dilemma of course, is to describe this ephemeral entity without representing it as a conceptual object. It must be an alternative to logocentric modes of thought without either succumbing to their logic or setting up a reverse logic. She hypothesises that the chora is closer to the ruptures and flows of bodily and vocal rhythm than it is to an originating identity. As unmediated matter it consequently lacks both a thesis or a fixed position, and following Plato who named this space a "wet nurse of Becoming", she calls it "nourishing and maternal".²¹ (p. 26) The place that articulates the drives or primary processes, the chora as a *privileged locus of space* supports the continuous passage of flashes of energy across the space that will become the subject, and nurtures the conversion of these flashes into a mobile series of psychical marks or stases. This articulatory function gives its materiality a primitive kind of form or kinesis, and permits the introduction of the term "semiotic", whose Greek meanings include the sense of "distinctive mark", "trace", "precursory sign", "imprint" and so on. (RPL: 25) The semiotic together with the topology of the chora, introduce a feminine alterity, an "unmediated" materiality, *within* language in the form of the operation of the drives across a perpetually fragmented body, "une substance morcelée". (RLP: 19)

We might ask in what sense may the chora and the semiotic be associated with the maternal? The semiotic is at its most active firstly in the modern text where it destroys and renews meaning, and secondly in pre-Oedipal relations. As Kaja Silverman indicates, it reflects a fantasy of container and contained: the mother

²⁰ *Timaeus*, trans, Francis Cornford, in RPL, p. 239, my emphasis.

²¹ In "Julia Kristeva et Al", Paul Smith argues that the figure of the chora acted as a transitional stage in Kristeva's progress from analyzing negativity through the semiotic/symbolic "doublet" to reifying the semiotic in *Powers of Horror*. Smith's article is self-conscious and politically correct (according to Smith's own terms, at least), but it is nonetheless true that the chora represents an originary stasis within the wider negativity of the semiotic. This form of positing/residual identity to my mind however, is inevitable for any discourse, no matter how anti-phenomenological. See Feldstein and Roof (1989), pp. 84-104, especially p. 96 and passim.

englobes and nurtures the child; the child projects its needs on to the mother's body.²² The chora is both material support for socialisation *and* the locus of negativity (the continual displacement of these supports). The mother however is not ultimately intended to represent or stand in the place of the chora. Rather, this space exhibits aspects of maternity deprived of an identity (that is, the identity of the actual mother who in fact *restricts* the chora's negativity through her socialising role). Maternity as process is privileged, but not the maternity that reminds us of "milky phonemes" and "shit and nappy rash". In the chora we find its life-sustaining energies are supported by a movement that extracts the possibility of human subjects with identities and destinies as effortlessly as colour bleaches from the night sky, or as ink eats into fabric. What remains is what Sollers named "an infinite perpetuation of the enounced; or . . . a generalized *dis-enunciation* continually demonstrating the absence of any subject whatsoever . . ." (RPL: 221)

Clearly in this account Kristeva privileges the elusive kind of articulation supported by the semiotic over and against the sense of structure and restraint as exhibited by the mother. Thus the semiotic is certainly somehow feminine, but equally that place within the subject and within language "of aberration, incoherence, uprooting": (*Sém*: 99) the place, if we are to hear the echo of Hegel in these words, as most conducive to an overturning of consciousness and a dissolution of all fixed identities. Negativity drives the chora even as it dissolves the identity of the female voyager. And it is this aberrant maternal space that dreams *us*, and that returns within language to cut up the linear orderliness of thought and meaning. Like some inhospitable memory, the semiotic takes refuge within society's "signifying architecture" only to unsettle its very foundations. That she chooses to equate disruption and renewal of language with the feminine reflects a determination to restore a certain kind of privilege to the pre-Oedipal mother whom Freud and Lacan had passed over in their rush to

²² Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 102.

link culture and desire with the Phallus. But the feminine is principally charged with the task of revolutionising being. It plays host to the only form of epiphany Kristeva believed possible today, yet its enigmatic qualities could never sustain an autonomous *female* subject. Kristeva's strategy in elaborating a thematics of place, therefore, is to push mimesis and phenomenology to their outer limits. Reading naturalises strangeness through the need to make a meaning. In searching for a ground to support her own identity, the female voyager looks to claim the chora for maternity's privileged support, yet an unsettling surplus remains that actually resists all attempts to give "place" any final identity.

3. 1. II. a topography of the page; displacement and transposition

The activity of reading carries certain expectations concerning the use of *space* in a text. Depending on the particular genre, we are accustomed to see writing arrange the space of the page in a set of conventional ways. The languages of mathematics, logic, literary criticism and so-called "free verse", for example, all tend to give rise to different topographies appealing to different writerly conventions. Kristeva's early writing often gave the impression of drawing from at least the first three of the above categories all at once, while also revealing an obsessive fascination for the relation of space to poetry.²³

In her preoccupation with space, she was clearly influenced by Mallarmé. Her debt to the French symbolist poet arose from his search for an allusive writing that would "Peindre non la chose, mais l'effet qu'elle produit". It was "the horror of the forest or the mute thunder strewn in the foliage" rather than any realistic account of trees that Mallarmé wished to produce.²⁴ Accordingly, he took seriously the problem of arranging words on the blank page, which he

²³ The most significant writer from whom she derives her conception of space and its relation to poetic language in *Revolution in Poetic Language* is undoubtedly Mallarmé, but she was certainly influenced in addition by more contemporary texts that also wrestled with the question of space, and in "Word, Dialogue, and Novel" she alludes to the free verse poet Francis Ponge. See *Desire*, p. 74.

²⁴ Bosley (1977), pp. 14-15.

named "Science".²⁵ Space literally animated the word, and its generative qualities were as much a part of the mystery of literature as the words themselves. In his preface to "Un coup de dés" he talked of "un espacement de la lecture",²⁶ elsewhere naming the layout of the page, its arrangement into print and space, "le dispositif": a device or technique that deforms and reforms.²⁷ Since Kristeva herself places this poem at the very *centre* of her thesis on a revolution in poetic language, we can conclude that she has appropriated his reading of space for her own ends. And if we were then to move on and examine "Un coup" more closely, we would discover that the role of chance in the poem is intended to inhibit the reader's ability to predict meaning and its passage across the space of the page. For those who read it aloud, the gaps, interruptions and doubling achieve the effect of a musical score, which is to say that no single voice can speak or enclose being which appears and slips away through the spaces and letters of the text. Every time the image dissolves into the void, the empty page reappears to remind the reader of the fragility of her existence and the indifference of an "exterior" to her desire for meaning. "Any thought utters a dice throw" and produces a constellation where "nothing will have taken place but the place". Once again, shipwrecked and facing elements inscrutable yet vast, we are brought to the edge of extinction when we recognise that if "the place" is that site of creativity, it also remains the site of its subsequent disappearance: a blank page that throws and re-throws the dice.

Despite the value placed on the generative qualities of space, the performative nature of rhetoric in *Revolution in Poetic Language* actually contests this value. Considerably at odds with the experience of Mallarmé's "mute thunder", reading a Kristevan text for the first time is to become lost in an impenetrable thicket. Its pages are crammed with specialised terms, lengthy complicated sentences, and

²⁵ La Charité (1987) quotes from his *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), p. 563 on p. 27.

²⁶ In La Charité (1987), p. 30.

²⁷ In La Charité (1987), p. 43. Philip Lewis in "Revolutionary Semiotics", *Diacritics*, Vol. 4, No. 3, (Fall 1974), p. 32 suggests "dispositif" may also be translated as an "instrument", which would accord with both Kristeva and Mallarmé's use of music.

compressed allusions to other intellectual discourse. Up until and including *Revolution in Poetic Language*, the typography of the page is at times interrupted with graphs and equations from logic and mathematics. Thickly branching syntactic trees add their flourish (*RLP*: 276-9) and the whole daunting effect is underlined by an impressive array of italicised print, which as Bachelard so nicely puts it is "but engraving while we write". Kristeva's style is emphatic and triumphant, and these typographical markers convey an implicit message: "master builder at work!"

The conceptual edifice of *Revolution in Poetic Language* is a *filled-in space*, intellectual cross-hatching at its most dense. Its architectural style displays a showy synthesis of other discourses transposed to a new site. We encounter a huge range of terms from Husserlian phenomenology, early Russian semiotics, Hegel, Freud, Lacan, Saussure and Benveniste, among others. In fact, Kristeva's expansive borrowing from other discourses leaves the impression that she is a true obsessional, her preoccupation with naming creating an armature for the text that makes it frequently both tedious and impervious to critique. In this environment where the urge to master the unknown leads to the writer's enclosing herself in an impregnable stronghold, we could suggest that the text itself becomes the ultimate form of Law, psychic space collapses, and the subject experiences abjection. Thus there are times when the vastness of scale abruptly contracts in a mass of detail, threatening to crush the reader in the relentless refusal to allow room for the *imagination* to mediate between the Other and the real.

Despite the symptomatic nature of the prodigious denominative power exerted by this text however, it is important to keep in view the ambitious rationale that underlies Kristeva's theoretical vocabulary. The reader is not permitted to forget that the intention of *Revolution in Poetic Language* is to expose at every opportunity the material forces of contradiction that structure social and

subjective practice. When biology meets culture its negativity produces a landscape at once boundless and constricting. For the subject this landscape is the exteriorisation of a more fundamental kind of negativity represented by the alternating moments of creation and destruction worked by the drives. The drives' pulses *are* the means whereby language and the subject are transformed (estranged). So it would be peculiar if even critical discourse was not able through the rhetoric of its performance, to bear witness to its own investments in semiosis. Hence we are forcibly reminded that the text is not merely a conceptual entity, but a visibly material practice that calls on an equally wide range of affective responses in the reader. That these material forces may even be seen at work in the way words (and fragments of signifiers, in some cases) move between and within discourses merely endorses the massive and self-confident scope of an argument that aims to estrange all thought.

More specifically, the distinctive topography provides the necessary support for the discussion of two crucial processes responsible for opening out the body of language to the unnameable. The unique treatment of *transposition* and *displacement* represents the central and indeed the most unorthodox aspect of Kristevan semiotics. With the transposition of terms from one discourse or field of application to another, and the displacement of terms through poetic association within a discourse, we come to a vital mechanism in this astonishingly synthetic text that transforms its sources and influences even as it quotes them. We will recall that Althusser had spoken of the "novelty of non-novelty"²⁸: in other words, of the facility of a new discourse to change the entire sense of an expression. This fascination for making things new energises Kristeva's vocabulary, but by no means exhausts it. A more persuasive explanation for the layered effect created by extensive borrowing and coining of terminology lies in the relationship she establishes between displacement, transposition, and their kinetic effects in poetic language. Together with

²⁸ See Chapter Two.

condensation, these first two activities form pre-symbolic articulations of the drives which Freud first observed functioning in dreams and subsequently named primary processes.²⁹ When the subject encounters the semiotic, the presence of the drives effects radical changes in the nature of his identity, inviting the unfamiliar to make its home in the familiar: "The (familiar) abode is for man the open region for the presencing of god (the unfamiliar one)," as Heidegger would say. Kristeva's version of an encounter with god rests, in the early work, on the transformation effected in language and subjectivity by affects: that is, by the drives. The body that linguistics and philosophy have brushed aside can thus be restored to speech in such a way as to place it forever beyond the reach of knowledge. Through displacement, an opaque semiotic body is transferred from a realm of biological negativity into a realm of light and forms, bringing to language that music of letters which Mallarmé knew. Mallarméan poetics must be demystified however, Kristeva argued, by reading his poetry with the help of Freudian drive theory. It was the drives and more specifically, primary processes, that were actually responsible for musicating language. Although active entry into the symbolic at the Oedipal stage tends to override their pathways with a system of signs, primary processes can still be seen at work in poetic language.

But how do we understand poetic language? In his introduction to the English translation of *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Leon Roudiez traces the history of poetic language to Russian formalism. Ossip Brik [sic] founded the Society for the Study of Poetic Language in Moscow in 1917, where the term was seen as standing in opposition to communicative language.³⁰ When Roman Jakobson later wrote that "poetry protects us from this automatization, from the rust that

²⁹ An example of transposition, familiar to many lay readers of Freud, is the movement of symbols from lower to upper parts of the body in cases of sexual repression. Consult *Volume 4: The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. James Strachey (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1986), p. 509. An example of displacement is the censorship that occurs in the dream and which "gives no more than a distortion of the dream-wish which exists in the unconscious." (p. 417)

³⁰ In *Desire*, p. 2. "Ossip" Brik is mentioned in Leon Roudiez's preface.

threatens our formulation of love, hate, revolt and reconciliation, faith and negation",³¹ he had in mind less the poem as object than that function of poetic language which unsettles habit, and upon whose murder (or repression) society is founded. The poetic function makes signs palpable by enhancing the material texture of the signifier through multiplying meanings: in short, poetic language firstly opens a radical distinction between itself and language that bears a message, and secondly, between the world of signs and the world of objects. Kristeva incorporates these readings, but revolutionises them so that in becoming the privileged language of the margins poetic language stands for the infinity of the code of language,³² expressed in its most intense form through the processes of condensation, displacement, and transposition.

We will recall in Freud that condensation related to the tendency a dream-work displayed of combining in one event a number of different experiences.³³ In a broader sense, the activity of condensation produces a plurality of significations and "non-recoverable syntactic elisions" such as the many instances of interrupted syntax one can find in Mallarmé.³⁴ Transposition and displacement by contrast operate either by placing signifiers in new contiguous relationships that generate recurring specific associations, or by drawing the drives over the signifier/signified divide into the symbolic system so the subject experiences jouissance. In the case of the first aspect of transposition, the association of disparate signifiers across texts, Kristeva draws on Saussure's remarks on anagrams. Saussure had speculated that Latin poets disguised a variety of proper names in their texts by producing a series of "motivated" signifiers which could be recon-

³¹ See his essay on "Qu'est-ce que la poésie?" in Tzvetan Todorov ed., *Questions de Poétique* (Paris: Seuil, 1973), p. 125. This final sentence is omitted from the English translation in Volume 3 of the *Selected Writings* (The Hague: Mouton, 1981), pp. 749-50.

³² See particularly Kristeva's "The Ethics of Linguistics" in *Desire*, pp. 23-35, and see also *Séméiotiké*, pp. 178-9. For a useful explication of infinity and its relation to poetic language in Kristeva, consult John Lechte (1990), pp. 91-118.

³³ Freud (1986), p. 266 and *passim*.

³⁴ See for example, the elisions in "Un coup des Dés". Mallarmé also mentioned transposition in the context of rejecting realist description in favour of allusion and suggestion: "essences are distilled and then embodied in the Idea . . . This is the Ideal I would call Transposition . . .". From "Crisis in Poetry" in Bradford Cook trans. (1956), p. 40.

nected.³⁵ He was unable to prove his thesis, but Kristeva, fascinated by the feel of ancient mystery, takes up his idea to argue that the kinds of anagrams discoverable in poetic language are numerous. The anagram is related to transposition's additional facility for drawing semiotic material up over the gap separating signifier from that primary signified now lodged in the unconscious. As we shall discover, she claims that the repressed memory of our incestuous relation with the mother's body is given new life when poetic language taps into its source and draws it up into the text. Such an ingenious reply to Derrida's contention that "the thing itself always escapes"³⁶ is, one might argue, the crux of the Kristevan semiotic argument, but while impressive in some respects, its audacity equally leaves it vulnerable to charges of essentialism, even wishful thinking. We will see exactly how this method of argument works later in the chapter with her reading of Mallarmé's "Prose pour des Esseintes", for there are a number of difficulties implicit in linking transposition with a motivated arrangement of signifiers. However for the meantime we will leave this objection to one side and return to the peculiar nature of the landscape Kristeva has laboured to construct.

We see that the Master Builder of semiotics has erected an impressive, sometimes perplexing array of building blocks upon which she will construct her own intellectual edifice. The experience of warding off a weighty mass, of forcing a path through a densely planted wood, or of Borges' spectator meeting his insignificance in front of monumental architecture, resembles the affects the reader will encounter in *Revolution in Poetic Language* and *Séméiotiké*, although this experience of estrangement will be at its most sharp in the early stages of reading when the texts are still overwhelmingly alienating and eccentric because unfamiliar. Thus coming to terms with Kristeva's idiosyncratic style is to learn to negotiate a distinctive topography that while heavily derivative,

³⁵ This information in Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), pp. 249-50.

³⁶ Derrida (1973), p. 104.

ultimately uplifts these borrowed terms to an elsewhere and there proceeds to construct something new.

As further evidence of this "distinctive topography", we could do no better than to read a typical piece of Kristevan text. Here the reader again meets up with the familiar rhetorical strategy of borrowed terminology grafted onto an elusive new object:

But having rejected the old poetry as a fetishistic guardian of meaning and the subject, one also had to shun the lie of unspeakable delirium, first by maintaining the difficult crossroad of heterogeneous contradiction with and in the symbolic order and then by signifying the violence of drives in and through codes - moral, scientific, everyday, journalistic, modern, familial, economic, . . . interminably. (RPL: 83-4)

What an extraordinary piece of writing this is. Its sheer length, its comprehensiveness, its interminable syntax all bear witness to an intelligence anxious to *leave nothing to chance*. No "throw of the dice" here, but rather the construction of an aggressive theorising that seeks to communicate truth as comprehensive product. Nothing is left out of this prodigious reasoning; consequently the reader is left breathless with no space to respond to its grandiose ground-plan which takes in everything from aesthetics, Freudian fetishism and drive theory to the entire social and economic support system! Such a strategy enacts what James Creech has termed "reading as triumph":³⁷ the mysteries of the unknown, that sleight of hand that language in all its ambiguity represented for writers like Mallarmé and Bataille is here reduced to a triumphant "Q.E.D.". Mystery has been pinned down and named, analysis points to the indisputable "truth" of Kristeva's theory of "heterogeneous contradiction".

³⁷ James Creech, "Julia Kristeva's Bataille: Reading as Triumph", *Diacritics*, Vol. 5, No. 1, (Spring 1975), pp. 62-68. In some respects I find myself to be in sympathy with Creech's rather hostile review of Kristeva's interpretative practices, which he argues represent a philosophical domestication of the "radical otherness" of Bataille's writing. (p. 62) He neglects to observe however, that Kristeva's own strategies are developed in an attempt to avoid mastery through negation.

Yet while the operation of chance appears to be eliminated on the level of meta-theorising, from the point of view of stylistics, contradiction and "fuzziness" slip in through the text's "interminable" syntax. The subject of the sentence is situated between two sites of denial: "But having rejected . . . one also had to shun", the time of his action mediated by the modifiers "first" and "and then". If the subject has been supplied with an ostensible time (one "option" followed by another) and a purpose (to avoid fetishism and delirium), he has no place from which to depart and return to other than one of negation, or negativity. The conjunction "But" which begins the passage thus fails to make any real progress (teleology), instead heralding an incessantly circuitous motion that constantly stops short of establishing a sense of identity. On the syntactical level then, the reader's ability to find a meaning is frustrated, and even the ostensible subject of the sentence, "one", appears about to be swept away by predicates (" . . . maintaining the difficult crossroad . . . signifying the violence of drives . . .") intent on shattering the temporal logic of "first" and "then", and hence blurring the very foundations of syntactic structure: the ability to link words together to form a meaning. We know that grammatical structure conventionally assumes a separation between a subject and a predicate, which are nonetheless *linked*. Making meaning therefore rests fundamentally on the axis of *combination*, where disparate conjunctions, modifiers, and predicates are joined sequentially to and through a subject who *means*. If this order is disrupted however, the subject's identity becomes a problem.

Since further reading can establish that Kristeva means something very similar when she writes of "heterogeneous contradiction" and "the violence of the drives" (and then further on of "the symbolic order" and "codes"); the reader can assume a certain redundancy which is *either* the product of self-indulgent writing *or* a deliberate strategy. If the latter, then the text surreptitiously bears witness to that shattering of discourse and the subject evidenced by the semiotic but given a false sense of purposeful movement by the modifiers "first" and

"then". I suspect that Kristevan syntax deliberately sets out to frustrate the reader's sense of progression acquired through accumulating meaning by looping back on itself in order to suggest that the only *end* to the text lies in an endless departure. Finding herself in someone else's dream, the female voyager struggles for a position from which to assess truth, but discovers she is the subject of a continual process where temporality (and hence linkage, concatenation) is interrupted (spaced) by seemingly gratuitous phrases, and where identity may be glimpsed solely in the movement from one to the other - "interminably".

One of the prime functions of reason is to give the subject a time and a place to inhabit. But if we reason as we read, then reading Kristeva makes us perpetual strangers, cast adrift from familiar dwellings and the comforting rhythms of habit. The above passage literally enacts this casting out of being; as Kristeva writes, "it *mimes* in the full sense of the term . . . [since] it repeats not a detached object but the movement of the symbolic economy." (RPL: 79) Like style it doubles back on itself to copy the gestures of the creative process while rejecting its *product*. Writing thus involves a death or a fading of surface meaning and uncovers a generative principle whose effects *negativise* transcendence and whittle away at the presence implicit in signification. Kristeva's understanding of what she calls "the symbolic economy" may be limited or even faulty, but she must be given credit for creating a topography that reproduces precisely this estranged and estranging object. And a principal agent of the new topography's construction is the doubling function performed by the "hinge".

3. 1. III. the figure of the hinge

You have, I suppose, dreamt of finding a single word for designating difference and articulation. I have perhaps located it by chance in Robert[*'s Dictionary*] if I play on the word, or rather indicate its double meaning. This word is *brisure* [joint, break] "-broken, cracked part. Cf breach, crack, fracture, fault, split, fragment, [*breche, cassure, fracture, faille, fente, fragment.*] - Hinged articulation of two parts of wood- or metal-work. The hinge, the *brisure* [folding joint] of a shutter. Cf

joint." - Roger Laporte in Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*.³⁸

Derrida frequently uses the figure of the hinge to explore language as writing. If language is constituted by *différance*, writing is a "discontinuity", and its discreteness may be mimed in the hinge which is both fracture and joint. As signification or articulation, writing "is formed only within the hollow of difference . . .".³⁹ The hinge has no position other than as the site of doubleness, no movement other than a ceaseless miming of discontinuity or gesture. It interrupts and spaces, causing a "drift" or gap in meaning, and so ensures that presence and identity as somehow full can never exist. Reading Derrida, Kristeva accuses grammatology of neglecting contradiction, the irruption of heterogeneous drives, and the positing function of language. "Contemplation adrift", (RPL: 145) *différance* is seen ultimately to neutralise biological negativity and to dissolve every thesis, its claims to deferral in the end failing to lift it out of a kind of textual stagnation. Spacing must somehow be connected to the biological body and the unconscious. Semiotics appropriates the hinge, drawing equally, however, on Lacan's use of the figure as an exemplary sign of psychic articulation.

"Charnière"; the point of contact of a hinge, is actually the term preferred over "brisure", the former carrying a stronger connotation of break or split. This is because *Revolution in Poetic Language* gives more weight to the inseparability of the semiotic and symbolic aspects of language and their mutual dependence on articulation. While accepting Lacanian terminology [*charnière*="psychosomatic articulation"], she argues that the presence of the drives in language alters the relation of the subject to desire by obstructing the kinds of fantasy desire leads to.⁴⁰ The subject is not a subject of lack as such, but one always already invested

³⁸ Derrida (1976), p. 65.

³⁹ Derrida (1976), p. 69.

⁴⁰ "The negativity *articulating two orders* and positing the never saturated subject in process/on trial between them - the drives' status as articulation - will be replaced by a nothingness - the 'lack' [*manque*] that brings about the unitary *being* of the subject." In RPL, p. 131. Here Kristeva outlines the limits of Lacanian desire which for her fails to take proper account of the presence of the drives.

with semiosis.

This emphasis on the drives is a crucial part of Kristeva's work on poetic language. The negativity or "rejection" of the drives figures as a hinge between human language and pure animal energy; as a boundary, in fact, *between home and place*, and between the familiar and the *unheimlich*. But as Derrida reiterates, the relationship between inside and outside is problematic: "this trace [or hinge] is the opening of the first exteriority in general, the enigmatic relationship of the living to its other and of an inside to an outside: spacing."⁴¹ The hinge as boundary opens the inside to the outside and vice versa; while regulating the two orders, it enables them to fold over each other and thus realises a perpetual disruption of intimate space, figured in *Revolution in Poetic Language* by the image of the house turned upside down *from within*. Matter from outside the system streams into the text mediated through psychic inscription. Cut up and patterned by writing, the drives' presence in language ensures that the textual body encounters and is renewed by a foreign materiality. In this way the house of being is revolutionised.

Although the drives seem to dominate Kristeva's use of the hinge, they do not monopolise it. When the hinge is understood to be the exemplary figure denoting a permeable boundary or threshold, the text of *Revolution in Poetic Language* can be viewed as an interlinked series of hinges that fold into each other. The activity of rejection, the function of meaning, positionality (the *thetic*), the text, multiple subject positions, art, and woman are all "hinges" [*charnière*]. Woman, for example, is "the indispensable border" between "not that" and "not yet"; (RLP: 614) art is "situated as a dialectical place between the symbolic system and the heterogeneity of the drives"; (RLP: 612) meaning "plays the function of limit and hinge" in relation to *jouissance* on one hand and signification on the other. (RLP: 613) There is something intensely frustrating with a landscape where

⁴¹ Derrida (1976), p. 70.

every distinctive feature is viewed as an aspect of the Same, despite a rhetoric that believes in the ascendancy of the Other. Doubtless the rejoinder would be that what these "hinges" have in common - their function of gesture - is what aligns them with the primal gestures of the chora or the unconscious. And if the unconscious is the locus of *difference*, then rejection, the subject, art, woman and so on, are of course infinitely varied entities in process. Such reasoning has its limitations, but the most important aspect of the hinge - its association with the positing, thetic qualities of language - needs to be taken more seriously. According to Kristeva, when the rejection of the drives falls into a pattern of repetition, it produces "a *threshold of constancy*, a *boundary*, a restraint around which difference will be set up - the path toward symbolization." (RPL: 160) This boundary is termed "the thetic moment", a commanding sign in the landscape of *Revolution in Poetic Language*.

3. 1. IV. the thetic

We discover that Kristeva constitutes the thetic as the threshold of language. Neither semiotic nor symbolic but a place of articulation, the thetic is produced by a break or rupture in the signifying process. It mediates therefore, between something exterior to language and its interior. For if the subject is to separate from his surrounding environment (from the mother first, and then from other objects and pre-objects) and exchange meaningful information with an other, a break must come about. Kristeva argues that the thetic is a realm of *positions*, and syntax, which presupposes an anterior spacing established by the thetic (a separation, in other words, between subject and object and later, between words and things), enables the subject to inhabit a space of *propositions*. Positionality or spacing therefore, *precedes* propositionality.

In this seemingly innocuous assumption, Kristeva takes up cudgels with phenomenology. Indeed the outcome with Husserl is foundational for her thesis on poetic language, although she does not signpost her re-reading of

phenomenology as clearly as she might. According to Husserl, objects can be experienced intuitively in their essential nature (*eidos*). The object is always an object for consciousness, but bracketing out the empirical self (*Einklammerung*) avoids all subjective expressions. Thus the essential nature of something can be intuited through the perception of pure consciousness. Abstraction connects the truth of experience to the thought of that truth. The desire to see the logical working of consciousness represents a mathematician's dream, but that knowledge might transcend itself and know its object recalls the all too familiar dream that longs for purity of vision. Kristeva's response is complex but worth following. She accepts firstly Husserl's suggestion that the thetic is something like a creative fiat where being is engendered by an active positing of name and sign (God's "Let there be light, and there was light", for instance). In phenomenology, the advent of being as meaning visited language not in the form of an epiphany from on high, but as a result of a constitutive act on the part of a subject whose intentions towards objects *posited* meaning. Nonetheless unlike Husserl, she views the bracketing out all that consciousness regards as non-verifiable or heterogeneous as a necessary but *imaginary* procedure. A (transcendental) ego must be still be posited for communication to occur, but where Husserl believed intentionality could grasp objectivity and hence meaning, Kristeva by contrast regards intentionality as having constituted itself *retroactively*. "Meaning" is therefore a positing, a projection of the subject's positionality. It is also a dream, a fictional construct. If that is the case, to look back beyond this threshold to the place where meaning has not yet separated from heterogeneity is to direct one's glance instead to an archaic "pre-intentionality" and "pre-objectivity"⁴² (the dream-world of the unconscious, in other words) that Kristeva considers to have *transposed* its primitive system of

⁴² Constraints of space do not permit a fuller exposition of Husserlian phenomenology, but it is important to note that Kristeva discovers the archaic pre-object in the figure of the *hyle* to which Husserl attributed the qualities of primitive material sense data. See Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, trans. W.R. Boyce Gibson (London: Allen & Unwin, 1931), pp. 258ff. She is critical of his insistence that even within the *hyle* is to be found a rudimentary formal organisation that submits to intentionality and thus to consciousness. What interests her more are the diversity of sensory impressions comprehended by the *hyle* which she links with the primary processes that are *not* bound to the consciousness.

difference (represented in language by syntax) upon the judging subject so that it may have being:

A *posited* Ego is articulated in and by *representation* (which we shall call the sign) and *judgement* (which we shall call syntax) so that, on the basis of this position it can endow with meaning a *space* [my emphasis] posited as previous to its advent. Meaning . . . is thus nothing other than a projection of signification (*Bedeutung*) as it is presented by judgement.⁴³ (RPL: 35)

To claim a permanent home in language for the *female* voyager would be, according to these terms, a necessary if illusory gesture. The sign posits the ego and articulates the enunciation of the female intellectual, but when heterogeneity enters language that articulation is obscured. We are all, men and women, equally homeless, universally subject to emptiness and loss. Thus for Kristeva, when philosophy has done with dreams of epiphanies, it discovers another, perhaps truer myth: that the advent of being is the negativity produced when the archaic semiotic body effects its disruptions in language. In fact even syntax, she believes, is the distant result of semiosis. Semiotic biological processes, moving through the fragmented body that is not yet a subject, operate through division but also to make *connections* between various parts of the body, and between the body and the outside world. Kristeva argues that this "psychosomatic modality of the signifying process" (RPL: 28) which includes activities of displacement, transposition, and condensation, establishes the preconditions for later socio-linguistic relations: the sign and syntax, and representation and judgement, which are in a larger sense transpositions of all those primary processes that precede syntax and the sign. Through the disruptive doubling of spacing, the articulation that occurs at the thetic stage permits the divisions inherent to a semiotic modality to be laid down (*projected*) over the linearity of

⁴³ On Husserl's distinction between *Bedeutung* and *Sinn* (meaning), Derrida notes that: "Meaning [*Bedeutung*] is reserved for the content in the ideal sense of *verbal* expression, spoken language, while sense [*Sinn*] covers the whole noematic sphere right down to its nonexpressive stratum". Derrida (1973), p. 19.

the speech chain. In short, the unconscious returns to language and the subject in the form of a discontinuous succession of epiphanies that constantly redraw psychic and linguistic space. And in this way we can say that the body is renewed and transformed.

The thetic calls for an act of identification or specularity: the mirror stage and the discovery of castration, as well as adolescence, are all important thetic structures. Here Kristeva draws heavily on Lacan's reading of the symbolic form of spatial intuition produced by the recognition at the mirror stage that "I is another" which then is *transposed* to a spacing in language.⁴⁴ The mirror stage is merely the first topographic intimation of mortality, and a crucial limit or constraint on the drives, for it establishes the *gap* between object and image, between semiotic process (signifier) and image (signified) and eventually between reality and signs. The primitive kind of spacing generated in the chora thereby gives place to a new, symbolic representation of space, illustrated by the way semiotic process is bound as a signifier *in relation to* another signifier. According to Lacan, the subject only actively enters the symbolic through the castration complex, which assures him of a position in language even as it forever removes the prospect of fullness of being and unmediated pleasure. The object recedes, its disappearance founding the nature of writing as exile. Inhabiting the realm of Lack where the field of signifiers set up at the mirror-stage is cut up and organised around a relationship to the Phallus, the subject learns to sublimate (re-locate) his desires through speech. Articulation in the world of signs thus takes over from the "articulation" of drives experienced in the world of objects and pre-objects; and we can liken the function of the thetic stage to a corridor or hinge that will assist this passage (from drives to signifiers and then to signs) between one realm and another.

⁴⁴ See Jacques Lacan (1977), p. 2. According to Lacan, a sense of difference arises at the mirror-stage; the advent of the castration and Oedipus complexes lead to moving from this register of signifiers to that of signs. On this question, see Elizabeth Grosz (1989), p. 45: "If the mirror stage initiates the field of signifiers, marked by pure difference, the castration complex generates signs, which organise and render these signifiers meaningful".

In assigning the thetic stage this intermediary role, Kristeva acknowledges that language is a dialectical structure that requires a third term that will enable the semiotic and symbolic to negotiate with each other. If the thetic did not exist, the body would constantly confront language in a hostile and unmediated opposition. In a way the thetic functions as a money-changer's house, converting one kind of currency into another. It gives the subject (and the reader) purchase on a necessary space between one moment of destruction and another. Yet the thetic is not some neutral zone: it too has its investments. While it is responsible for underwriting the symbolic economy, transferring the subject into a realm of meaning, we should not forget that its primary orientation is towards the constant movement of the drives. Its association with spacing is thus only partly in sympathy with phenomenological gestures, and only partly able to mediate the relation between semiotic and symbolic. More importantly, spacing is the replication in language of the constant splitting and reduplication of raw matter. In relation to the body, the biological drives represent an excessive kind of generativity.

In fact, were the drives to meet no resistance in their path, they would eventually return the organic body to death. Instead language transforms the body into a human subject by making it "the place of the signifier". (RPL: 49) Signification then becomes the pre-eminent form of substitution (or transposition) that stands in the place of the subject, signalling a position from which to speak.⁴⁵ Yet a transformation of the order of the drives demands a death, according to Kristeva. The founding break of the thetic is represented by sacrifice: a symbolic murder that mimes the murder of soma (the body) which occurs when the thetic is posited:

Sacrifice sets up the symbol and the symbolic order at the same time,

⁴⁵ Kristeva argues that the subject/predicate division is an indication of how this transformation from drive to signifier is registered - purely as "an inter-syntactical *division*". RPL, p. 55.

and this "first" symbol, the victim of a murder, merely represents the structural violence of language's irruption as the murder of soma, the transformation of the body, the captation of drives (RPL: 75)

To unpack the condensed narrative represented here we must turn first of all to a hypothesis suggested by Freud in "Totem and Taboo".⁴⁶ In seeking an explanation for the origin of society and the Law, Freud is led to tell the following story.

The father of the primal horde who has previously expelled his sons as potential sexual rivals, is one day killed and eaten by them. The sons, having arrogated their father's authority by consuming him, now claim the forbidden women for themselves, but in order to avoid the threat of social disintegration which presents itself under this new situation, they take steps to ensure that the violence which they have initiated is not repeated. They make incest *illegal* (upon threat of castration), insist that women are sought outside the clan, and commemorate the father's death with a sacred meal, thus in one stroke instituting totemism and exogamy.⁴⁷ Kristeva takes Freud's hypothesis and translates its structure into an account of the origins of the split in language between its poetic and communicative functions.⁴⁸

It is likely, too, that she considered Bataille's and Nietzsche's accounts of sacrifice

⁴⁶ Freud, SE XIII, pp.1-161. Freud made use of J.G. Frazer's *Totemism and Exogamy* (1910), which assumed a strong instinctual desire for incest (p. 123); Darwin's idea of the dominant male; William Robertson Smith's totemic meal; and his own observations in young male children of a fear of the father and an accompanying rivalry for the mother which is partly displaced through a phobia for animals (pp. 128ff).

⁴⁷ Freud observed that there appeared to be a strong link between the places where totemism survived, namely Australia, America, and Africa; and the incest taboo: "In almost every place where we find totems we also find a law against persons of the same totem having sexual relations with one another and consequently against their marrying." (p. 4) Lévi-Strauss differed on this point, excluding the necessity for totemism, but insisting on the fundamental nature of exogamy as the founding exchange mechanism of culture. The incest prohibition and therefore exogamy "is the primary step thanks to which, through which, and especially in which, the transition from Nature to Culture is made." *Structures Élémentaires de la Parenté* (1949) in Georges Bataille, *Eroticism*, trans. Mary Dalwood (London: John Calder, 1962), p. 198.

⁴⁸ In the context of an address to Harvard students on Russian poets, Roman Jakobson linked the suicide of the poet Mayakovsky with the crime mentioned by Freud in "Totem and Taboo". He suggested that this crime could well have been the murder of poetic language. Kristeva refers to this address in "The Ethics of Linguistics", *Desire*, p. 31.

to be equally productive, if not more so, for her reading of poetic language. Bataille conceived of the relation between transgression and the law as one of interdependence.⁴⁹ Taboos existed to preserve subjective identity and to enable society to function, but through transgression or expenditure the social order was temporarily upended. The most intense moments of law breaking were to be found in dance, frenzied possession, ritual, festival, feasts and orgies, reaching their final climax in death. In these kinds of excesses, people spent without counting the cost, allowing their identity to become swept away "in the grip of immeasurably convulsive turbulence".⁵⁰ Nietzsche's reading of the dual nature of tragedy contained similar themes.⁵¹ For Nietzsche, excess *was* truth. Once the individual had surrendered to wild states of paroxysm or self-abnegation, he would be in closer connection with the chaotic, "primordial unity" underlying reality. Interestingly, *The Birth of Tragedy* sets the calm order of the Apollonian deity against Dionysius, who left terror and ecstasy in his wake. We could, with some justification, read the interdependence of symbolic and semiotic as drawing on these oppositions between two Greek gods; the former standing for lucidity of the image, the other for its dissolution. One point of difference, however, is the rather specialised kind of role Kristeva attributes to sacrifice.

In *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Kristeva argues that the social order *viewed as a series of symbolisations*, begins with human complicity in the murder of the first father. The social order is founded in violence, its laws repressive structures that deny the intense pleasures of bodily excess. So the notion of original sacrifice is transposed into an exemplary symbol or *signifier*. Speech (and through speech, human identity) is thus founded on an absence and death: not exactly the death of a real body, but the murder of *soma* or uninhibited drives, which meet with a pattern of markings or restrictions [*charnières*] that will initiate their passage into

⁴⁹ See Bataille (1962), p. 36 and *passim*.

⁵⁰ Bataille (1962), p. 114.

⁵¹ F. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1967), p. 33 and *passim*. I am indebted to Keren Smith who drew this text to my attention.

signifiers.

The violent act referred to here is also a condensation of the Lacanian reading of the castration complex. The symbolic aspect of language is structured around negation: the father's "no" which forbids an incestuous relation with the mother. This first negation which represses an attachment to the feminine body is accompanied by a whole host of cultural prescriptions that further restrict and pattern the primary drives. The disruptive effects of forcing the subject to defer his negativity on to symbolisation mean that individual and social disintegration are forestalled through a displacement of that violence in language. Thus the very process of representation has a cathartic function which shifts trauma from the somatic to the signifying function. But although the subject can now signify the loss of bodily plenitude through language, he can never entirely escape the negative work of the drives that shatters identity. And in thus finding himself to be split between the orders of self and other, drives and reality, signifiers and signs, he is always something of a stranger to the house of being.

In one sense, the *thetic* is a metaphysical remnant cut loose from its phenomenological moorings. It functions as the necessary outcome of a social system that presupposes transactive relations between one and another. The subject still needs language to *mean*. Yet if Kristeva's critique of phenomenology is correct, language is not grounded in a transparency of consciousness to the object, but in an *excess* of meaning. The activities of positing meaning and subjectivity in the face of this excess then become self-deceptive rhetorical gestures - dice throws from a shipwreck, Mallarmé might say. Nevertheless for rhetorical effect, Kristeva insists on the *thetic's* connection with the Law. It breaks with the incoherence of the drives and sets limits on excess. And so the subject of poetic language must be the subject on trial, a thief who breaks *thetic* boundaries and alters the shape of speech.

3. 1. V. "house-breaking"

"Effraction": breaking and entering a space; breaching a law; house-breaking

The threshold of language is the effect of a positing - or more dramatically, a murder, sacrifice or cut that henceforth acts to orientate the biological body articulated by the drives towards the body of language, articulated by signs. Even so, those originary incestuous pleasures experienced by the body are not forever out of reach, according to Kristeva. Instead, the thetic and its positing function is frequently undermined by textual strategies and/or revolutionary social practice. *Effraction* is the term chosen to suggest the multiple strategies implicit in breaching the thetic, a disruption most clearly marked in poetic language.

Kristeva argues that through mimesis, the displacement and transposition that occurs in poetic language leads literature away from questions of truth and objectivity to explore the creative act. Earlier in this chapter I used the term "mimesis" to suggest the inevitable connection between language and phenomenology. In pursuit of meaning, language mimes (reproduces) the structures from the external world. For Kristeva however, writing with the imagination implies that the gaze of language turns inward and explores its own sublime nature. Its self-reflective glance contests denotation (the positing of the object) *and* meaning (the positing of the enunciating subject). It does so by miming *positionality* which, as we will recall, had been established by Kristeva as the form of spacing that preceded the act of positing. In this sense, mimesis is a radically anti-transcendent gesture. Undermining all conventional notions of exteriority, it recalls and reproduces the movements of the drives, but in an imaginary, linguistic register. The subject of poetic language is therefore a mobile subject with no one fixed dwelling who transposes signifiers from one sign system to another, and finds himself changed in the process.

Earlier we saw how Kristeva viewed the crux of transposition as lying in its abil-

ity to draw semiotic material up into language. Fractured and elided syntax, word plays, repetition of sounds and image-associations all bear witness to the presence of poetic language and to the work of mimesis. As the text harks back to the place of the most primitive break with the destructive forces of nature untrammelled by Law, its subject looks for a chance to experience *jouissance* through drawing into the representational structures of the text this incestuous, forbidden, pre-symbolic moment. Thus the text re-enacts Freud's *Common Crime*, but in addition, it *mimes* the constitution of the subject-in-process, unsettling home and hearth by opening language and the subject out to the estranging landscape traversed by the death drives. Perhaps these incestuous recollections are the closest Kristeva comes to representing an epiphany in language. This encounter with the sacred is not in the form of a Pauline conversion or a Proustian illumination though, but a vehement, almost unmediated return of the repressed experienced directly on the subject's body.

Moreover, whereas the thetic orders infantile space in the form of meaningful syntax, poetic language works in reverse. What is established within communicative language through mimesis is an archaic kind of spacing which Kristeva links to the notion of "signifying differentials", primitive apparatuses that provide a fragile locus for a signified formerly repressed in the unconscious. Jakobson had spoken of the poetic function as involving a projection of "*the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination*. Equivalence is promoted to the constitutive device of the sequence."⁵² Where the linguistic message exists for its own sake as in poetic language for instance, its composition will privilege equivalence over sequence or contiguity. As Jakobson saw it, the writer will produce a text that seeks to establish associative connections in the place of argument or reference to an objective reality. Kristeva takes this concise and illuminating definition and transposes it into the discourse of *sémanalyse*. Now the principle of equivalence comes to work quite

⁵² "Linguistics and Poetics" in R. Jakobson, *Selected Writings*, Vol III (The Hague: Mouton, 1981), p. 27.

differently, combining groups of signifying differentials, perhaps widely dispersed throughout the text, but all bound to a previously invisible signified in the unconscious (which according to Lacanian doctrine is the phallus, the subject of true desire).⁵³ Supplemented by the procedures of transposition and spacing, this notion of signifying differentials will be used by Kristeva in her reading of Mallarmé's "Prose pour des Esseintes", an extremely bizarre reading that grounds Mallarmé in the strange material world of the Unconscious.

The figure of the house-breaker lies at the very heart of *Revolution in Poetic Language*. His irreverant defiance puts the stamp of *Paradise Lost* on language, but by the same token, Kristeva's reading of Mallarmé offers an outrageous compensation. If the object forever retreats, its subject founded on emptiness and absence, Kristeva insists that the subject regains its lost hold over the pleasurable body through the radical gestures enacted by poetic language. We must not pass over her idiosyncratic reading of "Prose pour des Esseintes" too quickly, because it occupies a privileged position in the text. Its interpretation is both the outcome and the motivation for the earlier theoretical section which had established the interrelation between semiotic and symbolic. It provides the material support, in other words, that will permit Kristeva to connect body with language, but to do so in a most peculiar way. That little critical attention has been given to this aspect of the text seems all the more reason to me why its off the wall feel needs to be interrogated.⁵⁴

Let us then follow the stages of her reading of this particular poem of Mallarmé's from the beginning. Kristeva hypothesises that in the Romance, Germanic and

⁵³ Hence, "the principle of the supremacy of the signifier has instituted a *syntax* in analyzed language that explodes the linear meaning of the spoken chain, and reconnects the signifying units located in various morphemes of the text by following a combinatory logic." Julia Kristeva, *LtU*, p. 276.

⁵⁴ John Lechte reads Kristeva on Mallarmé, but only offers a partial estimation of the veracity of her reading. See Lechte (1990), p. 143. And in explaining why such a small passage of *Revolution in Poetic Language* was translated into English, Leon Roudiez, withholding judgement, remarks: "an argument frequently based on the material shape and sound of French words would hardly be comprehensible." Introduction, *RPL*, p. 10.

Slav languages there came to be a conflict between inherited classical metrical patterns and the subject's own rhythmical experience in his national language, which, she argued, gradually resulted in the adoption of the "word" as the fundamental unit of metre, especially from the time of romanticism, and especially in languages like English, German and Russian which had variable syllabic accents. The word, apparently closer to subjective experience for Kristeva, was able to access the drive-based sound patterns at the base of language. But French, because of its more rigid accent on the last syllable, was not as free to experiment in this way, and so writers turned to "artifice". Through experimenting with alliteration and a certain *timbre* or sound texture of the signifier, a number of French poets and especially Mallarmé, found a different means of accessing the drives. For this reason Kristeva argues, Mallarmé's verse opened on to "*another scene*". (RLP: 212)

Such an emphasis makes metricality (or rather, metricality as a form of motion or gesture) inhabit language as a privileged if disruptive guest. It also establishes its priority over grammar. But why the need to privilege rhythm? What does it signify in the text of *Revolution in Poetic Language*? Undoubtedly, the answer lies in the central role accorded to transposition and spacing. For if the "drive-based apparatus" [*dispositif*] can be shown to be explicitly linked to alliterative patterns and chains of signifiers in poetry, then we would have to accept Kristeva's argument that rhythm and motivation (and through them, the drives) are simultaneously the conditions of syntactic articulation and syntactic displacement.

Thetic unity in Mallarmé was primarily disrupted through the repetition or association of phonemes that produces "an effect which is *foreign* to the common usage of the natural language", (RLP: 221, my emphasis) and which leads to a "pre-phonematic" or "phonetic" state similar to the babble of childhood. Through this estranging procedure, the original phoneme is emptied of its

phonematic character and linked firstly to the "articulating body" through the apparatus of speech and then, through the drives, to the entire body with its topography of passages and sites of desire. Thus we can see that reading poetic language as a means of providing access to the material body is indeed a revolutionary conception. It literalises the language of exile by connecting the disruptive movements of the biological drives to the subject of the text, and in this sense poetic language becomes a centre for an intense form of estrangement that approaches Dionysiac excess.

More specifically, Kristeva follows Ivan Fonagy who linked specific drives with particular forms of consonant and vowel articulation.⁵⁵ She reads the "m" in "mama", for instance, as "labial, nasal, liquid"; and the "p" in "papa" as "labial, explosive", and then proceeds to correlate these two sounds with those of "incorporating" orality and "destructive" anality in the Freudian "fort/da" game.⁵⁶ Through these and other over-determined sounds, the speaking subject retains a close connection with the "body proper":⁵⁷ "the phonemes reclaim what the sounds have lost in becoming sounds of a given language: they reclaim the topography of the body which reproduces itself in them". (RLP: 222) These phonemic/phonetic elements that form new semantic associations are the signifying differentials which open language up to an infinite process of generation. Unfortunately, Fonagy's theory is not only dubious, but completely unfounded. In this respect, I would agree with Lacan: we cannot possibly access the pre-Oedipal body through language in such a way. Kristeva's ruthless drive for consistency ("the mother is dead, but she comes to life again through

⁵⁵ See his "Les bases pulsionnelles de phonation" in *Revue française de psychanalyse*, (January 1970), pp. 101-36; (July 1971), pp. 543-591.

⁵⁶ The game that Freud watched his grandson play was an attempt to master the fact of his mother's absence by connecting sounds with gestures that represented her presence and subsequent disappearance. Kristeva suggests that underlying this game is rejection, the binary *fort/da* pairing representing a destructive anality and a fusing orality respectively, which the infant transposes through reproducing them repeatedly on to a primitive signifying space. In so doing, through rejection he separates himself from his objects, thus establishing them as "real and signifiable." (RPL, p. 123)

⁵⁷ See RPL, p. 225 and *passim*.

language") has led her in this eccentric direction. If the female voyager has thus far managed to stay the course, she now finds herself pitched headlong into a very odd dream indeed. Kristeva's *Bildungsroman* of estrangement falters at this critical spot whilst the reader's own sense of estrangement approaches the hyperbolic.

Now Mallarmé was clearly sensitive to the sound texture of language, and Jakobson tells us how, despite feeling frustrated with the limitations of words like "jour" and "nuit" which in everyday speech in no way reflected the respective qualities of the spheres they named, he had observed that in poetry, through association "*nuit* darkens and *jour* brightens when the former is surrounded by a context of grave and flat vowels, and when the latter dissolves in a series of acute phonemes."⁵⁸ Mallarmé obviously experimented with the sound texture of language and frequently made connections between the sounds of words and their semantic associations. But Kristeva's analysis becomes absurd when she links Mallarmé's observations in "Mots anglais" with the *corporeal drive-based origin* of the sounds of language. Here is Mallarmé: "Akin to all of nature and reverting toward the organism which is the depository of life, the Word presents, in its vowels and its diphthongs, a kind of flesh; and in its consonants, a kind of bone structure, the dissection of which is a delicate operation".⁵⁹ Mallarmé had used the *image* of the body to approach the Mystery of Language. Flesh and bone were metaphors to illustrate the interrelation of sound patterns, yet Kristeva *literalises* "Mots anglais" so that its images acquire substantial identity in the form of corporeal, drive-based structures. She demonstrates a similar theoretical psychosis in her reading of "Prose pour des Esseintes". (RLP: 239-262)

⁵⁸ Jakobson, "Quest for the Essence of Language" in *Selected Writings*, Vol II (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), p. 365. Jakobson is here referring to Mallarmé's essay, "Crisis in Poetry".

⁵⁹ Julia Kristeva, "Phonetics, Phonology and Impulsional Bases", trans. Caren Greenberg, in *Diacritics*, Vol. 4, No. 3, (Fall 1974), p. 35.

In this reading the poem's traditional versification⁶⁰ is seen to be undercut by what she considers to be the supplementary network of signifying differentials. In each strophe, the patterns linking sexed body and sounds established by Fonagy are seen to make telling connection with the poet's use of the onomatopoeic qualities of sounds. The semantic quality of the strophe is then examined by turning firstly to Mallarmé's other texts where "identical" sounds have been used, and secondly, by taking these sounds complete with their semantic properties, and transposing them to the new context of "Prose".

To illustrate these general remarks, we will examine aspects of the reading offered for the first strophe:

Hyperbole! de ma mémoire
Triomphalement ne sais-tu
Te lever, aujourd'hui grimoire
Dans un livre de fer vêtu:

[Hyperbole! can you not
triumphant, today a rune
From my memory stand out
In a book clad in iron,]⁶¹

Kristeva claims that the dominant sound pattern here reflects a movement between an "aggressive phallic drive /tR/, /dR/, /f/, etc. and [an] anal [drive]" and the "incorporating oral (suction) drive" made of labials, /m/. (RLP: 242) The sound "m" is represented as the desire for fusion with the mother that Jakobson had first outlined,⁶² but Mallarmé's interpretation of what he called the music in letters was somewhat different. On the nature of "m", he had written that it "translates the power of making, thus joy, virile and maternal ('*m*âle et *maternelle*' [my emphasis]); then, according to a meaning that has come from a very long way back in the past, the measure and duty, number, meeting, fusion

⁶⁰ Irregular octosyllables, abab rhymes, caesura after the fourth line.

⁶¹ Bosley (1977), pp. 134-5.

⁶² The sound "m" represents the desire for fusion that Jakobson outlined in his article "Why 'Mama' and 'Papa'?" in R. Jakobson, *Selected Writings*, Vol I (The Hague: Mouton, 1961), pp. 538-545..

and the middle term: through a sudden transfer, less brusque than it seems, inferiority, weakness or anger."⁶³ Kristeva's startling observation on this admittedly expansive passage is that it too confirms the desire for fusion with the mother observed by Jakobson and others! I find her reading impossible to substantiate. Undoubtedly Mallarmé was happy to offer speculations on the associations conveyed by various sounds in language, but it seems to me that it is at the level of *speculation* at which his remarks must remain. Besides, there seems no compelling reason why maternal joy must be related meaningfully to "measure and "duty", for instance, or "inferiority" and "weakness". There is surely a considerable degree of arbitrary association to these significations, and I can certainly see no justification for amalgamating the multiple associations that apparently cohere around "m", into the figure of the (phallic) mother.

Having established that the role of the signifying differentials represented by labials connote maternal jouissance, the proliferation of the aggressive /eR/ and its variants in the text are read by Kristeva in the same exorbitant way to signal negativity, death, a destruction of unity and a fading of meaning. The readings of subsequent strophes are similarly structured around drawing equivalences between the semantic and phonic ordering of the poem. At each point we discover how the semiotic enters language and finds, in effect, a home *already prepared for it*, since even the semantic properties of words *literally represent* the pre-phonematic state which the semiotic alone is supposed to engender! If the symbolic anticipates jouissance and the death drive by signifying them, we cannot say as Kristeva had apparently wished to, that language is overtaken by excess, since its structures always already anticipate that excess. This is clearly not a move that occurs "behind the back of consciousness", uprooting the subject of the text, and confounding mastery. For if memory is hyperbolic and the hyperbolic as such causes memory and its signs to exist, in actual fact the writing subject still remains hyperbole's master. Presumably Kristeva had wanted to

⁶³ From *Ceuvres complètes*, quoted by Kristeva in *RLP*, p. 243.

equate the quality of hyperbole with drive heterogeneity, but allowing the text to *knowingly* prefigure jouissance makes her wider theory of poetic language a good deal less persuasive, and fails to eliminate a triumphant subject.

Kristeva's interpretative practice is acceptable if it is understood as forming an allegory or commentary on the negativity that may found the signifying process, but when evidence is derived from the repetitive sound patterns generated throughout the text to suggest that these are *motivated*, that is that they correspond with repressed signifieds (jouissance, maternal fusion, and death) formerly resident in the unconscious, is to take the reader too far from home! One critic to my knowledge has alluded to the questionable nature of motivation in language. Mark Adriaens criticised this very tendency when he presented Kristeva's analysis of an extract from Lautréamont in her essay "Pour une sémiologie des paragrammes". (*Sém*: 174-207) Kristeva had argued there that the pattern of sounds created by the signifiers in *Les Chants de Maldoror* leapt over subject/predicate groupings to shape the word "phallus". Since she considered that Lautréamont was dramatising the moment when the subject realises he is alienated in the Law of the Father, "phallus" effects a unity between phonological and semantic components.

As Adriaens reminds us however, there is a difference between connotative, poetic language and a semiotic practice that looks critically at its own ideological assumptions:

Whereas with the Saussurian sign, the relation between *signifiant* and *signifié* is arbitrary, in the poetic sign, the multiplicity of equivalences creates the illusion that the relation between signifier and signified is motivated and hence that there is a "natural" meaning inherent at the level of expression. In semiotic research, this very naturalization of signifying relations has been exposed as one of the most typical ideological mechanisms.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ "Ideology and Literary Production", in Zima ed. (1981), p. 196.

My purpose here is not to provide a sustained critique of Kristevan ideology, but it is to confess that this section of *Revolution in Poetic Language* is the most indefensible. What began as an ingenious attempt to subvert the fundamental law of language and identity - a law that insists on the separation of the subject from its first object of love - by inviting the object in again through the back door, has failed to convince me. The end result has been a valorisation of a select number of signifiers ("phallus", "jouissance", and so on) which approaches the condition of psychosis (where words and the body are inextricably confused). More importantly, the useful work on the action of the drives on the subject and in language is in danger of losing its authenticity altogether. It seems, in fact, that the practical proofs of semiotics have failed. The thematics of a revolutionary form of spacing lack credibility when applied to the microlevel of the text. Perhaps this is one reason why the emphasis of later work becomes more consistently thematic, favouring broader narrative sweeps that do not need to scrutinise the signifier's relation to the body so minutely.

English readers of *Revolution in Poetic Language* are unfortunately deprived of the opportunity to judge the truth of this reading of "Prose", since the translation by Margaret Waller presents only the first third of Kristeva's thesis. Ironically, we are provided with her hypothesis, but not with the material proof for these general remarks. In the case of a theorist like Kristeva who so pointedly refers to the need to ground the subject in a material practice, it is odd that the reader unacquainted with French is left up in the air, deprived of practical evidence with which to test the mechanisms that engender process within the subject.

Mallarmé had sought to provide a bouquet where the flower was absent; his poetry was built on a "lacuna", ("a lucid contour. . . which separated it from the garden"). In his country that did not exist, "Each flower more flagrantly bloomed/Without our discussing it". He lifted an exploration of absence to an art-form and despite his fetishism and aestheticism, we can admire this refusal to

fix meaning and identity in texts that would so easily yield up their repressed truth to the observer. In her eagerness to claim him for her own country, Kristeva has quite driven off the sense of mystery that pulverises the "Idea" by its evasion, its sheer slipperiness. For under cover of supporting the "imprecision" of rhythm and the "effect and not the thing", her theorising actually crushes the delicate flesh and bone structure of poetic verticality. Mallarmé's "dazzling music" quite loses its power to illuminate once Kristeva gives it eyes. I am reminded in fact of Mallarmé's comment in "Mystery in Literature":

For whenever She sniffs out the idea that obscurity may be a *reality*; that it may exist, for example, on a piece of paper, in a piece of writing (heaven forbid, of course that it should exist within itself!) She rises up with a hurricane fury and, with thunders and lightnings, blames the darkness on anything but Herself.⁶⁵

As Bachelard had written, the imagination calls us out of ourselves and submerges us in an ineffable place. His dreamer is a voyager charmed or disturbed by literature's "function of unreality". When an attempt is made to *deprive* the subject of this unknowable territory, those evanescent, beckoning horizons are closed down, their obscure brilliance extinguished. We will recall that Kristeva's project was to name the unnameable. In announcing her intention to press behind reason using reason's tools, she has successfully managed to turn the "obscurity" of Being into a prosaic (banal?) "reality". Behind poetry lies biology; behind the reticence of the image lies Freudian drive theory. To a large extent Mallarmé ranged himself against interpretation, and although criticism today has scant respect for intentionality, I consider that Kristeva's exercise in transposition has taken us too far from home and common-sense into a hallucinatory realm that has a good deal less life and interest than the impossible country to which Mallarmé always alluded, but never reached.

3. 2. "Le pays où tout est permis"?

⁶⁵ In Bradford Cook trans. (1956), p. 30.

Lettre à tout les mondes - vous êtes tous des cons . . . La prospérité spirituelle doit être considérée comme étant le but le plus élevé de la civilisation humaine . . . And earth put forth a thousand flowers to spread a couch; while ready for the bath the rock band gave out a limpid stream of crystal flow . . . monsieur le roi - monsieur le PRESIDENT vous me faites mal au ventre . . . donnez-nous notre drogue! . . . tu arrives juste à point on va manger merde . . . Sophie je t' adore!

Sophie Podolski, *Le pays où tout est permis* ⁶⁶

Virtually forgotten now, Sophie Podolski was a young Belgian woman whose journals were published posthumously under the title *Le pays où tout est permis*. Its pages are covered with spindly hand writing, crude drawings of human figures, and disturbing phantasmatic images. Podolski took her own life in 1974 aged 21. At one time Kristeva responded exuberantly to her work, seeing in it the anarchic spirit of a whole generation who rejected the Establishment and found new meaning in drugs, mysticism, and free love: "In Podolski I read not only what is traditionally considered feminine (sensations, colors, etc.) but a certain sensitivity to language, to its phonetic texture, its logical articulation, and throughout this entire written and sketched universe, the ideological, theoretical, political conflicts of our time." ("Oscillation": 166-7)

Podolski overdosed several times, and Kristeva's effusions obscure the fact that her writing borders on the incomprehensible either from schizophrenia or drug-induced hallucinations. Probably what she found so attractive was Podolski's lack of inhibitions and her self-destructive urges that seemed to invest language with a very explicit and violent kind of eroticism. That language can have a *body*, even if it exposes us to psychosis, opens literature to a different kind of reality: a place of negativity and jouissance, where everything is put into play.

The dust jacket of Kathy Acker's *Empire of the Senseless* draws a map of a new

⁶⁶ Transedition, 1979 (no formal pagination).

New World: the waves are dotted with tattooed sailors and floating ships filled with blood-drenched pirates. Violence and sexuality dance together in this strange commonwealth that eventually defeats the forces of law and order in a horrific urban civil war. Acker blatantly celebrates the dangerous, anarchic side of ourselves that most of us would rather not acknowledge. Her characters are voyagers learning to negotiate the sublime, terrifying world of the Unconscious. Bodies get out of control, run amok, and burst apart or fragment. This kind of destructive carnivalesque spirit is similarly reminiscent of Kristeva's fascination with the links between pleasure and death. She produces a map of the body, a (female) voyager's guide to a place where all is permitted and where the ultimate erotic pleasure derives not merely from a loss of bearings, but from the threat of complete annihilation.

3. 2. I. negativity and the drives; *jouissance*

But the life of the Spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it. It wins its truth only when, in utter dismemberment, it finds itself. It is this power, not as something positive, which closes its eyes to the negative, as when we say of something that it is nothing or is false, and then, having done with it, turn away and pass on to something else; on the contrary, Spirit is this power only by looking the negative in the face, and tarrying with it. This tarrying with the negative is the magical power that converts it into being.

Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*⁶⁷

The moment that rhythm overwhelms its metrical constraints and threatens to sweep away signifying structures is one of negativity. It dismembers the subject and opens social and artistic practice to the devastating work of the drives. The instinctual drives were originary psychic structures or energy flows that Freud named "Triebe".⁶⁸ We can only treat the drives hypothetically, formulating

⁶⁷ Hegel, trans. Miller (1977), p. 19.

⁶⁸ Laplanche and Pontalis define the drives as dynamic processes "consisting in a pressure (an energising charge, the factor of propulsion) which makes the organism orientate itself towards an aim. According to Freud, a drive has its source in a corporeal excitation (a state of tension); its aim is to suppress that state of tension which dominates its instinctual source; it is in the *object* or thanks to it, that the drive is able to reach its goal." Cited in Marc Quaghebeur, "Julia Kristeva, une

their existence after the fact, but from their operation through the unconscious and through observing the psychic and linguistic development of young children, we can conclude that these archaic structures are the product of the very first attempts of the subject to set up a number of limits in the face of the flux of the real.

But what is the "real"? In *Tales of Love*, it is defined as "that impossible domain where affects aspire to everything and where there is no one to take into account the fact that *I* am only a part." (*Tales*: 7) It is an order prior to all forms of articulation, and not recognising difference or loss, is an impossible place of fullness. Since the symbolic presupposes a lack for representation to occur, the real is unable to be represented or conceptualised. Alice Jardine designates it as the "nonhuman, at the limits of the known; it is emptiness, the scream, the zero point of death, the proximity of jouissance."⁶⁹

In linguistic terms, the coming of the real into the symbolic reflects the eruption of what cannot be symbolised (drives, energy cathexes and so on) into language. In reinterpreting the drives, Kristeva again distinguishes her reading from Lacan's. For Lacan lack, which emerges at the mirror stage when the child perceives the loss of its mother and/or the breast, is the essential precondition for the formation of the drives. He opposes instincts (the order of the animal world) to drives (the order of the symbolic and imaginary worlds), and distinguishes the sex-based drive from need.⁷⁰ Whereas Freud in many instances gave us to understand the drives were biologically determined, Lacan insisted that they were dependent on the effect of the Other.⁷¹

philosophie de l'avant-garde", *Les lettres romanes*, No. 26, (1972), p. 369.

⁶⁹ Jardine (1985), pp. 122-3.

⁷⁰ "The instincts ('vital somatic functions') provide the grounds or traces for a series of neuronal pathways traversing the body which will later mark out the pathway of impulses facilitated by the drive . . . [which] is based on a corporeal mimicry of the instinct . . . The drive borrows the sites, sources, and techniques of satisfaction generated by instincts to develop its own modes of (sexual) satisfaction." In Grosz (1990), pp. 56-7.

⁷¹ Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Jacques-Alain Miller ed., Alan Sheridan, trans. (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 180 and passim.

Kristeva compromises between the two positions. Viewing Freud's theory of the drives as a hinge between biology and society, she blurs the distinction between drives and instincts, regarding the instinctual and the objective process as one and the same. Yet rather than relegate the drives (and hence "objectivity") to a realm of pure biology outside human experience, remaining therefore permanently exiled from dialectics and hence conceptual structures, as we have seen with the chora, she maintains that they simultaneously articulate a pattern of psychical marks across the body, thus investing it in a dialectical signifying practice. The full force of their activity cannot be grasped or measured by consciousness, but instead their constant division and multiplication reflects the repeated division of matter that engenders *signifiance*, the production of meaning in excess of consciousness. (RPL: 167)

Matter that is always dividing and splitting represents the activity of a perpetually unstable force that uproots consciousness and divides "presence" and "being". Language is therefore subject to renewal from within, and in this way is put in touch with the unnameable, those aspects of the semiotic body *behind* the mirror that language cannot register. The generative properties of the drives do not recognise a teleology given once and for all, but rather follow a diversity of paths; and the body is in the constant process of relieving the tension created by their activity, only to discover their insistence elsewhere. In confronting the inescapably violent and implacable character of instinctual forces, we are brought, like Hegel, face to face with the "negative".

Indeed, the death drive is the most primal drive and the most important one to be cathected in literature. Freud outlined its nature in his essay "Beyond the Pleasure Principle". The death instincts reflect the way that all life has a dominant tendency to return to death. Although the seat of these instincts is to be found in the ego, which were it not for the activity of external forces upon it,

would manifest passive indifference to the world; they also persist, argued Freud, as a lining to the life-giving sexual instincts. So both Eros and ego are driven by fundamentally conservative instincts. Through removing the source of tension from the drives, these instincts seek to return to an earlier condition: that is, death. Aggressivity and violence are merely the roundabout paths taken by the organism to achieve this goal.

Sites dominated by the death drive include abjection, primary masochism, madness and melancholia: boundary experiences where all limits to meaning and identity tend to be swept away. All the same, the death drive is never without some kind of organisation, and from the outset is marked into a series of charges and counter-charges which perpetually destroy old stases and renew themselves through repetition (producing new stases). Kristeva terms this articulatory motion "rejection" and its negativity plays a crucial role in connecting the body to language and society.

An exemplary form of transposition is imparted to rejection and negativity. This latter term is borrowed from Hegel. Somewhat similar to the destructive activity of the drives, negativity for Hegel comprehended a continual deferral of consciousness from itself, a recognition that the moment of truth is only apprehended in the movement between the fixity of the object and its difference from itself. Like the subject-in-process, Hegel's "Subject" is "pure, *simple* negativity", a reflection on the otherness within itself which leads to "the moment of the 'I' . . . in the process of becoming".⁷² Negativity is what mediates between self and other and for Hegel what enables the same to distinguish itself from the other. It puts thought and its subject in process, being the privileged figure of heterogeneity and excess. The subject of negativity does not recognise a permanent opposition between inside and outside, but understands whatever

⁷² Hegel describes this process in terms of the subject who "negates itself in indifferent, external otherness" and then "reasserts itself as the negation of all such otherness" [= "negating the negation"]. Hegel, trans. Miller (1977), pp. 10-11.

transitory self-identity it may acquire as having emerged out of a struggle. Seeking enlightenment, but recognising the intransigence of the alien object as a challenge to consciousness, it accomodates the other within itself in order to master it.⁷³ True subjectivity then lies in *departure*. The self is like a traveller who in a state of unrest, continually flees the fixity of being to make new conquests and discoveries, but the self is also a being "which has returned into itself", transformed and revived by its unrest.

What originates being for Hegel is not, at first glance, the alien intransigence of the object which appears in all its immediacy and "simple universality", but the way consciousness dialectically transforms and is transformed by this object.⁷⁴ Thus the flashing sun-burst which spreads across the horizon of the consciousness is not an epiphany from outside the system, but a result of the dialectic's being transcended (uprooted) and represented in a new form. However, because transcendence negates the negation, it returns to confirm identity through affirmation of the "positive" and the "universal". This particular kind of naturalisation in Hegel means that his thought is still ultimately confined within the house of being. Kristeva notes that his understanding of negativity restricted it to something that went on within the consciousness, rather than a force that challenged the consciousness from "outside". (Where "outside" represents an unknowable material residue whose locus is the unconscious.) We can see therefore that Hegelianism still needs a foundational moment for thought and being, and it disguises a First Cause within the activity of uprooting. The First Cause for Hegel requires that consciousness initiates negativity to translate the

⁷³ Hegel, trans. Miller (1977), p. 497. In his commentary of Hegel, Robert Solomon notes that Hegel does not make a clear cut distinction between the subject of thought and substance. The self is not an autonomous entity, but instead "cannot be intelligibly distinguished from the objects it is aware of. This subject is substance, and substance becomes subject . . . when it starts to become aware of itself." *In the Spirit of Hegel: A Study of Hegel's "Phenomenology of Spirit"* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 284.

⁷⁴ "This negativity, as self-transcending contradiction, is the *reconstitution of the first immediacy*, of simple universality; for, immediately, the Other of the Other and the negative of the negative is the *positive, identical, and universal*." *Hegel's Science of Logic*, quoted by Kristeva in *RPL*, p. 249, n. 86.

alien nature of the unmediated object into something that it can know and master. Thus he has added a mystical surplus to negativity that ensures that the strangeness of the *first* appearance of the object for the subject (Matter), when connected to the new strangeness the object acquires through being transcended in the dialectic (something that occurs "behind the back of consciousness"), finds its "natural" home within Absolute Mind (the end of consciousness). This kind of mysticism which united Mind, Matter and the dialectic was clearly *not* a feature of Kristeva's re-reading of Hegel.

Hegel anchored excess and alterity finally in the circle that returns the other to Absolute Mind, but along the way he established a path that would permit Kristevan semiotics to use these privileged instances when consciousness is uprooted as *founding moments* for all subjectivity. In *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Kristeva removes all connotations of transcendence - as it has been conventionally understood - from Hegelian negativity by lifting it out of its former conceptual system, calling it "rejection", and grafting it on to her own theory of signifying matter. Negativity now becomes a *foundational semiotic moment*, and one of the pre-conditions for language. (Kristeva also claims that those so-called unmediated moments of creation or recognition when the object first appears are merely variations of uprooting, and can also be attributed to the "jolts" of matter in constant process.) *Rejection* is a more finely-tuned version of negativity, referring to the destruction and renewal of drive charges which are *transferred* from the space of the semiotic to the space of the symbolic through *signifiante* as articulation. Its introduction provides the tangible means to link poetic language with negativity and *jouissance*.

In *The Pleasure of the Text* Barthes distinguishes the culturally produced "plaisir" from "jouissance", that which is beyond cultural praxis. A text of pleasure is "the text that contents, fills, grants euphoria; the text that comes from cul-

ture and does not break with it, is linked to a comfortable practice of reading."⁷⁵ The text of *jouissance* on the other hand, "imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts . . . brings to a crisis his relation with language."⁷⁶ In further passages, this alienating effect of *jouissance* is brought home: "I love the text because for me it is that rare locus of language from which any 'scene' (in the household, conjugal sense of the term), any logomachy is absent."⁷⁷ The text of pleasure "prattles" like the tiresome wife; affords "ungratified sucking", produces "milky phonemes", and is "frigid" and neurotic.⁷⁸

Barthes here, like Kristeva, has fallen into the familiar mode of criticism that links the comforting, domesticated rituals of life with texts that do not lead us away from the habitual and the socially approved into that forbidden country where *jouissance* is to be found. Their practice is to stuff us so full that we have no chance to feel loss or the shock of the "*absolutely new*". The narrative that affords bliss loses the subject, loses everything in fact, in its perverse tracing of an estranged, disfigured topography.

The path of ex-istence⁷⁹ which Lacan had linked with the unquantifiable economy of bliss experienced by "Woman" in Kristeva comes to represent an "*infinite* of meaning". (RLP: 613) Through the eruption of the drives into the literary text and in the subject-in-process, signification is exposed to the infinite. She shares neither Lacan nor Irigaray's fascination with the female mystic, whose supplementary sexuality (their orgasmic capacity) links them with the Infinite (God). Her use of *jouissance* as a notion is therefore less voyeuristic than Lacan's,⁸⁰ but equally encyclopaedic. In *Revolution in Poetic Language* the

⁷⁵ Barthes (1975), p. 14.

⁷⁶ Barthes (1975), p. 14.

⁷⁷ Barthes (1975), pp. 15-6.

⁷⁸ Barthes (1975), pp. 4-5.

⁷⁹ "Might not this *jouissance* which one experiences and knows nothing of, be that which puts us on the path of ex-istence?" Jacques Lacan in "God and the *Jouissance* of the/Woman" in Mitchell and Rose eds (1982), p. 147.

⁸⁰ Stephen Heath's article "Difference" in *Screen*, Vol. 19, No. 4, (Winter 1978/9), pp. 50-112, deals nicely with Lacan's appropriation of the feminine as something to be seen. (See espec. pp. 51-61.)

term is indicated in and associated with a whole gamut of occasions from *signifiante* and rejection to the destruction engendered by erotic and textual excess.

The most critical locus of *jouissance* that throws the subject into crisis is Freud's notion of expulsion (rejection), an infinite repetition that returns. In Freud's article on "Verneinung", expulsion [*Ausstossung*] constitutes the real object, establishing an outside that is never fixed, but which must always be posited.⁸¹ Its symbolic representation is the sign of negation.⁸² Freud reads the symbolic as the site of repression of all pleasure which is dominated by the superego, but Kristeva asserts that underlying the symbolic is the specific pleasure of expulsion which in turn derives from the anal stage. In the anal stage the openings on the surface of the body are eroticised through drive charges, which makes expelling substances from these sites pleasurable. Anality may be reactivated in literature, where non-symbolised form (as negativity) breaks up domestic tranquillity and inserts paragrams and glossolalia into the signifying chain.⁸³ Destructive urges in poetic language underlie both oralization (music, rhythm, prosody, paragrams, incest), and the more phallic, positing aspects of language, represented by the aggressive image of the "homosexual phratry", presumably to identify it with the first Crime. Barthes similarly links incest with *jouissance*. Rejection by this means announces in the literary text the return of the repressed and ensures that *jouissance* is always *outside* the household scene.

81 "What is bad, what is alien to the ego and what is external are, to begin with, identical." "Negation" in SE XIX, pp. 235-6, p. 237.

82 Kristeva argues that the first instances of signified negation in children occur around 15 months which coincides with the mirror stage. It precedes or at the very least coincides with language development. From a very different perspective, Gottlob Frege has written on the qualities of negation in P. T. Geach ed., *Logical Investigations*, trans. P.T. Geach and R.H. Stoothoff (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977): "In thinking we do not produce thoughts, we *grasp* them." (p. 25) Thoughts are solidly built structures (p. 28) that cannot be dissolved by the "chimaera" of negation: "It must be possible to negate a false thought, and for this I need the thought: I cannot negate what is not there." (p. 37) Negation therefore recognises a positing of subject and graspable thoughts since it also contains within its grasp an affirmation.

83 See *RLP*, pp. 209-358.

Although I will read Kristeva from a more critically female perspective later in the chapter, it is important to comment in passing that these pleasures that are so glibly held up here as the most desirable kind of jouissance - incest, anality, even a certain fetishistic orality - certainly would not accord with the deepest longings of most women, or men, for that matter. Incest remains a real and painful experience for those children who have been molested, and it is interesting to see that in Kristeva's later work where she maintains a more active role as theorist and analyst, and has probably encountered many incest victims, its aestheticisation fades in importance. I cannot see women queueing up for anal pleasure either, which could just as easily be rejected as a form of infantilism, even if anality was considered by the generation that had witnessed the upheavals of 1968 to be a *risqué* anti-bourgeois metaphor for a wider social critique. I am also intrigued to see the repeated connection made between sexuality and violence. Apart from the po-faced tone of much of this writing on jouissance, it disturbs me to watch a capitulation to some of the more unpleasant practices worked on the figure of the female body in the name of "bliss". Indeed, her fantasies approach the grotesque forms of violence inflicted on the protagonists in William Burroughs' "The Naked Lunch". There is no room for tenderness in the early Kristeva, none whatsoever. Such vehemence gives her writing an apocalyptic resonance but herein lies its weakness too. Because the semiotic is associated with a) the death drives (negativity) and b) the biological body, its destructive effects become difficult to contain. While insisting on the mediating role of the symbolic, it is clear that Kristeva is infatuated with forces that wipe out all forms of consolation and security. Her disavowal of joy, beauty and delight, not to mention female subjectivity, evidence a refusal to relate the body and matter to a more compassionate and differently embodied form of sublime. In sum, the pleasures of jouissance and rejection she describes and privileges are male, and often fetishistic ones at that. And it is interesting to note that this kind of patriarchal dream is rejected in the later *Tales of Love*, which celebrates not eros but agape, whose subject loves without mastery or annihilation of its object.

Yet credit must be given where it is due. The complexity of Kristeva's argument means that we must give space for its large claims to unfold, even if as readers there are aspects of her theory we find questionable. And in summary we can say that *jouissance* borders on the unrepresentable, the inexplicable. Through the destructive pleasure that results from the explosion of the unconscious into psychic life and discourse, being is divested of its comforting supports and brought face to face with the negative. Whether it arises from plunging meaning into the infinite, reviving anality, or multiplying subject positions, *jouissance* diverts the female voyager from her intended path to a place of non-being: existence. It takes her in other words, to a "country where everything is permitted".

3. 2. II. reproduction and the state

Throughout her thesis, Kristeva has been at pains to establish that a poetic revolution must be grounded in social praxis, and by corollary, that the present state of social, political and economic crisis experienced by Western capitalist societies is a laboratory conducive to a "revolution" in language. The particular kind of signifying practice she studies has, in her view, at once provoked and reflected a social crisis, resulting in a profound alteration to the subject of discourse: a change in "his relation to the body, to others, and to objects". (*RPL*: 15) The subject of poetic language in capitalist society today sees himself in opposition to traditional family, religious, sexual, and political structures, (*RLP*: 619-20) and Kristeva appeared to believe in 1973 when this thesis was completed that it was only a matter of time before these supports collapsed or were radically redefined. Despite the fact that there are large portions of the text that seem to demonstrate little connection with historical and social time, abstraction is almost always underwritten by a latent feel for the pressing reality of contemporary events, or for the cultural and political climate of late nineteenth century France which she believed shared some affinities with today. Admittedly the "country where all is permitted" was clearly not a real country, and its hypotheses were often highly

speculative, at times giving the impression of floating in a theoretical stratosphere. But Kristeva attempted to "ground" negativity and *jouissance* by anchoring them in subjective and social experience through studying what she saw as their estranging, ultimately disintegrative effects on traditional social structures and speech.

Society and the identity of the subject are at their most tenacious and yet paradoxically, at their most operative place for renewal, Kristeva believed, within the crucible of the family. For when the subject rejects its approved forms of pleasure and takes on the role of intrepid explorer in a country "beyond the pleasure principle" we can assume that family structures and personal identity are in the process of breaking up. We can also witness in such action a valorisation of process and productivity over product. In *Revolution in Poetic Language* this opposition between process and product takes the form of the difference between "genitality" and "sexuality" or "reproduction".

Kristeva offers the image of "dilated humanism" as the figure which will oppose genitality. Swollen with "child", humanism meets its downfall at the end of the nineteenth century when its inflationary supports are toppled: "no-one, not a single person, nor any linguistic, discursive or rhetorical unity can contain ["embrasser"] the infinity of the process." (RLP: 615) A remark surely intended to be as pungent as Lacan's observation in *Encore* that "there is no sexual relation". Instead of housing an identity the spectacle of pregnancy will be transposed to an invisible, impenetrable textual "genitality" whose swelling is an inflation of meaning that engenders infinite ruptures in the social code, just as *jouissance* engenders infinite meaning. But aren't these claims vastly exaggerated? Did humanism really come to grief in France last century? While this is not the place to offer an intellectual history of the period, Kristeva argued that the great avant-garde and surrealist experiments of the twentieth century took their key from the poetic language of Mallarmé and Lautréamont, and even, in a more remote way,

from the political and social changes that occurred in France from the time of the French revolution and the Napoleonic wars to the events of the Paris Commune of 1870-71. It was the cumulative effect of these events that produced such a change in poetic discourse which would eventually lead (passing through Freud, the anti-humanist *par excellence* for Kristeva) to the impossible subject of textual practice today.

In the same way that *engendrement* has traditionally been coded to ensure germination that produces a final product, genitality conventionally signifies reproduction of the species. It rests as the ultimate support of the symbolic because human society quite simply would not survive without the family. The symbolic as a matter of fact actually tends to repress the more radical genital processes that threaten the stability of a text, and subsumes them under the conventional expression, "reproduction". (RLP: 613) But when *jouissance* bursts through the text's defences and makes meaning a permeable threshold and hinge rather than a walled enclosure, the text can take up a new position in relation to genitality: reproduction as *product* undergoes a transformation into genitality's potentially infinite *process*. When the product disappears, so too does the means of representing a visible landscape. Nor can the subject of process remain housed in a domestic enclosure, and with the collapse of the house of being, with the discovery that there is an "absolute absence of any foundation",⁸⁴ we find ourselves once again surrounded by an estranged and estranging topography. Of course, even if we assent to this seemingly wholesale denial of the product and its ground, we are by the same token in no position to observe or measure genitality's functioning. Its processes are not visible within society's institutions except as they operate through poetic discourse, and especially through the language of the text that challenges all phallic positions of mastery.

The strongest thrust of textual explorations such as these is directed against the

⁸⁴ Derrida (1978), p. 224.

privileged place of the mother in capitalist society, who because of her role in socialising children, cannot help but prop up the social structure. Part of the hostility directed towards the figure of the mother springs from a refusal to knuckle under to social prescriptions for family life that would lead to bourgeois respectability. We should not forget that for the generation growing into adulthood in the sixties, producing children was no longer an inevitable part of suubjective experience. For the first time in history, reliable contraception made it possible to radically separate sexual relations from impregnation. Feminine jouissance, not to mention sexual *pleasure*, now seemed attainable without weighing oneself down with a child. For this reason, aspects of maternal life are viewed in *Revolution in Poetic Language* as profoundly threatening. In fact, Kristeva claims that the mother's conservative instincts make her vulnerable to commodification by capitalism; turned into a *product*, she acquires commercial circulatory value. (One could think of the marketing of the female orgasm, women as sex objects in advertising, woman as consumer of goods, woman as "feminist", as current examples of commodification.) But a position that *negativises* the two complementary figures (woman as silent support of the family and woman as reproducible image), is the jouissance or genitality that cannot be known or turned into a product. It must not, however, be tied to a privileged identity: "Woman", for example, because that would merely reconfirm the notion of women's investment in helping society to function. On the contrary, only as the irruption of the semiotic into meaning does genitality have a space in the text. This is essentially because knowledge must remain a "stranger" to semiotic process which by its very constitution dismembers the phallic mastery implied in the symbolic subject (Man/Woman). The topography represented by genitality as distinct from that represented by reproduction is therefore ranged against all forms of mastery, and only in this displaced sense can it be called "feminine". In which case the protagonist of the female voyager can never be considered to maintain a place of privilege in the text. She too must submit to the vagaries of climate and topography which in this country

ultimately render all forms of subjectivity derelict.

Social transgression, jouissance, and the radical dereliction of being are at their most developed in Kristeva's view in the experimental writing of modernity. As early as the late nineteenth century though, Mallarmé and Lautréamont had taken the first steps in that direction. A whole host of social identifications, she believes, were challenged in their texts: sexual difference, the father as Law, the fascinating mother, the castrating woman, the power of the State, religion; all the above, *when opened to the full force of language*, touched the most painful and intimate sites of our culture: "les lieux névralgiques". (RLP: 612) But no matter how Kristeva idolises the early avant-garde, she is also careful to point out that Mallarmé and Lautréamont did not go far enough in their writing, which finally remained dependent on the "old architectural metaphor". (RLP: 369)

In different ways both writers clearly attacked language and the subject, but they only "timidly" addressed social struggles, and by thus confining their textual experiments to the realm of art, they did not succeed in challenging the fundamental principles of logic, unity and presence presupposed by the State. As supreme representative of the symbolic, the State was an overarching architectural structure, sheltering poets within when it came to social and political practice, and expelling them to the exterior (with reverence or hatred, depending on the occasion) when they took up their role as Artists. Kristeva believed however, that capitalism would not be properly challenged until work on language could be carried out *internal* to the "house of the state". In this way Art - Proust's "Paradise" - would not longer be sacred and separate, and political revolution would incorporate a critique of its unacknowledged investments in the Old Order. Group coherence itself would thus be put in question when the infinity of the signifying process was introduced into the wider social code.

At the same time, one must not neglect the important, path-breaking work

undertaken in late nineteenth century texts. Neither Mallarmé nor Lautréamont took bourgeois values for granted, and each viewed their writing as fundamentally shaking the foundations of literary and social convention.⁸⁵ Kristeva's explanation for their preoccupation with aberrant sexuality and unconventional literary style is a psycho-political one: a state like the French bourgeois republic of the late nineteenth century experienced power as fragile, and so fetishised it in the forms of religion, feminine mystery, and poetry.

Even if Kristeva's linkage of fragile power structures and feminine mystery is incorrect, historians tend to bear out the division in the Third Republic between political instability and a stable, homogeneous, and conservative society.⁸⁶ Between 1870 and 1914, France experienced sixty changes of government. Although the provincial landed gentry continued to remain a force in French society, their dominance was challenged by the rise of an increasingly diverse middle-class, a social group whose interests were reflected in the 1870's and 1880's by Republican beliefs in progress and democracy. Perhaps one of the reasons for Mallarmé and Lautréamont's attack on the family was the privilege accorded it by a nascent capitalist society, who saw it as a coherent centre for the accumulation of property and capital, as well as a strategic place for the consolidation of social values. By and large, the relative homogeneity among the upper and middle classes in terms of cultural aspirations led to an endorsement of such virtues as nationalism, democracy, religious faith, and patriotism. Even the conflicts later in the century over secularisation tended to elide an unquestioned identification of religious and civic virtues.⁸⁷ For these reasons then, the norms governing reproduction and the family appear to be "the last guarantees of sociality", and it

⁸⁵ Witness Lautréamont's opening lines: "It is not right that everyone should read the pages which follow; only a few will be able to savour this bitter fruit with impunity"; and later, "show me a man who is good . . . But at the same time increase my strength tenfold; for at the sight of such a monster, I may die of astonishment: men have died of less." In *"Maldoror" and "Poems"*, trans. Paul Knight (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), pp. 29, 33.

⁸⁶ Consult, for instance, R. D. Anderson, *France 1870-1914: Politics and Society* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), p. 30 and passim.

⁸⁷ Anderson (1977), p. 91.

is against these outposts that the texts of Mallarmé and Lautréamont are ranged.
(RPL: 613)

Unfortunately one of the problems with their texts was that they tended to confirm fetishism. Kristeva's discussion of the place of the fetish in language is of considerable interest, since it might well be argued that her own reading of Mallarmé's "Prose pour des Esseintes" replicates this condition. From a psychoanalytical point of view, the nature of fetishism is to deny that the phallic mother is castrated, and to pretend that separation from her has never really occurred. (Kristeva suggests that the problem could actually go as far back as a difficulty in separating the ego's image of itself in the mirror from the pre-symbolic, semiotised body. [RPL: 63]) At the same time, fetishism sets up an object strong enough to stand in front of the phallic mother's "reality" and screen its threat for the subject. This object then absorbs the full force of the thetic function of language, which has now been displaced from the symbolic on to the drives, various parts of the body, or a host of objects associated with the body. (One less personal example of the fetish is capitalist society's valorisation of the product; its privileging of reproduction over genitality.) On the other hand, the above explanation of fetishism also makes the artist vulnerable to the same charge, since his task is to allow language to be invested with semiosis. Kristeva argues, not entirely convincingly, that artistic practice narrowly avoids the full force of fetishism by maintaining *signification* in the face of the seductive object (eroticised organs of speech, the "music in letters", and so on). The text therefore is not a real *substitute* for the phallic mother, but a *sign*.(RPL: 65)

Yet she also acknowledges that in some respects every text is a fetish, halting the signifying process by investing it in objects ranging from "verbal material" to an aspect of social or political experience. The text now becomes the apparent (fetishistic) sign of the phenotext, that visible aspect of its discourse which registers meaning and structure. As a hinge between subject and object, the symbolic

and the real, the text as (imaginary) fetish maintains the difficulty, perhaps the ultimate impossibility of ever clearly separating these two orders. For Kristeva then there is a sense in which subject and object, symbolic and real are never clearly distinguished, ["jamais nettement distingués"] (RLP: 362) because negativity has established that a *doubt* underlies all activities of positing and erasing being. At times, the conflation of symbolic and real in the text leads, as I have mentioned, to a state of abjection. Spacing, that necessary gesture performed by the thetic, is minimised to the point where the reader feels crushed by the massive weight of theoretical apparatus towering over the horizon, obscuring the sky with its ambitious spires and turrets. The lack or failure of space points to the recurring difficulty in developing a structure that will mediate between semiotic and symbolic so that neither entropy nor a deadly abstraction prevails. I will return to the question of space and its relation to the semiotic shortly. This disturbing form of uncertainty or negativity however, does not necessarily lead to the text's becoming permanently abject. When the text opens the body and discourse up to the processes of the drives, Kristeva argues, the need for fetishism as a protected enclave fades, and difference and loss are restored to the subject's representation of himself and others.

Despite the fact that the text at the end of the nineteenth century challenged the fetish of representation in its hostility to naturalism and realism, its denial of or anxiety towards sexual difference limited the radical scope of its discourse. The aesthetic in Mallarmé for instance tended to take the form of a fetishistic regression or a holding back of signification, according to Kristeva. Through the different figures of absolute woman, fascinating mother, dancing animal, and absent father, Mallarmé's artistic practice attempted through fantasy to close the gap opened by castration. Lautréamont's writing was of a different order. In *Maldoror* and *The Poems*, there is a continual struggle between "I" and "you" which Kristeva links with Orestes' murder of his mother. (RLP: 470) This murder seems to be the condition for a radical upheaval in the text's language -

nothing is forbidden anymore once a man has murdered his mother. Here, the mother is seen as both phallic *and* castrated (waiting to be punished). An abiding fear of her "étréinte génitale" ("genital grasp") seems to have led Lautréamont to a conception of genitality completely unlike the inaccessible and fascinating mystery it became through literature for Mallarmé. In Lautréamont genitality is rendered as something so terrifying that it must be dominated by a sadistic and phallic possession: "'Maldoror courageously excavates the vagina of the unhappy child with an American knife.'" (RLP: 471)

But in what way is it possible to regard these so-called rhetorical strategies (which by and large I find to be quite distasteful) as any more than the elaborate acting out of a common anxiety: that is, fear of the female body? Kristeva maintains (somewhat dubiously) that such texts can be accorded the venerable label of genitality because of their refusal of the conventional norms governing sexual and familial obligations and because above all, their struggle to defeat bourgeois convention and put language on trial leads to jouissance and to a dizzying multiplication of subject positions. (RLP: 470-2) Reproduction is thus subverted by jouissance and genitality, leading to hallucinatory experiences, a syntax overwhelmed by rhythm, and an excess of linguistic prohibitions. Curiously in this brave new topography mapped out by the avant-garde, there is little place for love or redemption. Negativity in the shape of rejection affords the subjects of *Maldoror* jouissance and provides a frisson for Igitur skulking in the tombs, but these borderline experiences are encountered in a place far beyond the pleasure principle, and seem only to end in death or a self-indulgent kind of despair.

The country where everything is permitted then, offers us a fascinating and novel map of borrowed terms (negativity, rejection, jouissance, genitality) grafted together to produce a text that makes no apologies for celebrating violent rivalry, hatred and destruction: the failure of transcendence, in short. These marginalised forms of social experience have here been recast by Kristeva to

assume a position of dominance in the construction and deconstruction of speech and identity. Indeed, they are primarily responsible for the distinctive landscape of writing produced by *Revolution in Poetic Language*, and add astringent emphasis to Blanchot's understanding of the country of writing as a place that leaves "the lovely, clear light of day" far behind.

While it may now be impossible to reintroduce an unproblematised form of metaphysics into a reading of the text, I feel that Kristeva's early alternative posed in *Revolution* - to make semiotic processes carry the burden of a first cause - has not been altogether successful. On the one hand, the affective landscape is profoundly alienating. More importantly, I consider that the foundational notion of spacing (as negativity and so on) is not conceptually robust enough to do the work Kristeva's poetics requires. Firstly, the homologous relation set up between bodily space and linguistic space is unable to be sustained at the microlevel, as we saw with the reading of Mallarmé. That both forms of space may be sustained by tenuous divisions between outside and inside, and that psychic anomalies are often connected to linguistic anomalies (as, for example, in abjection) does not necessarily lead me to conclude that there is a *consistent* causative relation between them. Nor does it necessarily follow that both spaces can invariably be collapsed into the same primal container (the unconscious, the semiotic, "biology"). I am aware that in relation to psychoanalytic theory this is an unorthodox response, and am further aware that new readings of the body/text problematic would need to be unfolded within the context of a very different thesis from this one. As I have chosen by and large to work within a psychoanalytic framework, this criticism can only be presented as a doubt made in passing. But the second observation concerning spacing and the work of the semiotic is, I feel, vindicated by my readings throughout the chapter. Although Kristeva insists that the semiotic is in a sense "articulatory" and thus always already in language, the sense of thetic restraint is too fragile in the face of the dominant aspect of the semiotic, which is its hostility to all forms of meaning

and identity. Behind the notion of the semiotic lies a vengeful, unregenerate Nature which allows the imagination *no room* to negotiate the path between drives and signs. Consequently the (female) voyager's body has a tendency to become indistinguishable from raw matter, an "unbearable monstrosity". Neither at home in the house of being nor finding shelter outside, she discovers the inscriptions of language have been elevated to the status of a remote, disembodied and non-negotiable Law which *always* reads the semiotic as a place of destruction in which *she* somehow belongs. I shall develop this point in the following chapter where the standoff between semiotic and symbolic becomes more apparent. But whereas by *Powers of Horror* the spacing mechanism is so jammed that body and sign are locked in constant opposition, *Revolution in Poetic Language* still attempts to forestall this failure of genuine and renewing transformation by insisting that the place of the subject is empty - a *blank space*.

3. 3. "no-one at home"

. . . unless he brings to his reading a rigorous logic and a tautness of mind equal at least to his wariness, the deadly emanations of this book will dissolve his soul as water does sugar.

Comte de Lautréamont, *Maldoror*

Bataille had suggested that the most revolutionary poetic practice should be sustained "outside the family shelter".⁸⁸ Kristeva's response is to insist that the house is ready to be turned upside down from within, in which case it would come to stand on the very edge of human society. The topography of estrangement that has gradually been revealed in a reading of Kristeva's texts illuminates the disfigured landscape that results when the topos of the house is turned inside out. This strange place is without an inhabitant, or at least entertains one in the process of being perpetually dissolved. Phenomenology's judging subject has

⁸⁸ Kristeva appeals to this figure of Bataille's several times throughout *Revolution in Poetic Language*, but the original reference is to be found in *L'Expérience intérieure, Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), p. 220.

been led to an elsewhere, to a place that threatens to push him over the edge or reduce him to an impossible unity, struggling, like Hamlet "against the curse of having to appear".⁸⁹ In which case the voyager can hardly insist in any direct way at least, on her own feminine specificity. She too must allow herself to be dissolved by the semiotic.

3.3.1. effacing the subject of enunciation

In an earlier text, Kristeva had written, "At the very origin of narration, at the very moment when the writer appears, we experience emptiness. We see the problems of death, birth, and sex appear when literature touches upon this strategic point that writing becomes when it exteriorizes linguistic systems through narrative structure (genres)." (*Desire*: 74-5) Originally published in *Séméiotiké*, "Word, Dialogue, and Novel" is a blow by blow account of the effect on literature when the word of an ambivalent subject is introduced. The reader discovers herself to be constructed through a dialogical process which recognises the production of a text as "an *intersection of textual surfaces*"; that is, a dialogue "among several writings: that of the writer, the addressee (or the character), and the contemporary or earlier cultural context." (*Desire*: 65)

The potential of a divided speech act indicates a split *within* the writing/speaking subject, and this is what Kristeva develops where she defines writing as the "trace of a dialogue with oneself (with another), as a writer's distance from himself, as a splitting of the writer into subject of enunciation and subject of utterance." (*Desire*: 74) "I" always speak my discursive, representing, communicative "I" from "somewhere else", and it is this other place that discourse can never fully represent, which is that of the signifier, the subject of enunciation.⁹⁰ The enunciating subject therefore is not present on the surface of speech and the term cannot refer to the actual subjective, present-to-itself identity of the speaking

⁸⁹ Mallarmé in Bradford Cook, trans. (1957), p. 57.

⁹⁰ For this distinction see Roman Jakobson, "Shifters, Verbal Categories and the Russian Verb" in *Selected Works*, Vol II (1971), pp. 130-48.

subject. Instead it is repressed in the unconscious, and the major evidence we have of its passage through language lies in the markers of anaphora, tense, personal pronoun, ellipsis and repetition. And so again we are returned to the space of absence, to that place where the subject's positing is "always unsuccessful [*position manqué*]". (RLP: 24)

The early chapters of *Revolution in Poetic Language* set out to amass a more comprehensive form of representation for the subject absent from the surface of speech, and pluralised by its deepest structures. In essence Kristeva's desire is to grind down the surface topography of phenomenology and dismember the transcendental ego assumed in different ways by modern linguistics, in order to make visible a radically new signifying architecture. On the site that she maps out, no-one is at home except Language. The semiotic is logically anterior to (yet also synchronous with) the subject posited by the symbolic, and because of its pre-eminence, especially in poetic language, its presence introduces *death* for the subject.

While maintaining a rudimentary form of *énoncé* and *énonciation*, the text announces the doubling of the subject, or his removal to an imaginary place, a "nowhere". Kristeva acknowledges that the most intense textual experiments that render all positing void have occurred since Freud and the symbolists in the writing of people like Artaud, Joyce, and Sollers. Undoubtedly the avant-garde text today is the privileged place where the signifying process appears to function without a subject, but the principle of the absent subject has a seemingly universal application, since the symbolic also posits the subject as absent. (Fetishism is a denial of this murderous form of positing.) How exactly does it function? We see that through the work of language, the body is protected from the death drive and the phallic mother; the process of transposition from the organic world of things to the human order of signs turns the body into "the place of the signifier". But there can be no room as far as Kristeva is concerned

for an *identity* to claim this place and fill it with the narcissistic reflections of an ego, anxious to name itself Artist or Master. Transposition occurs at the cost of maintaining an empty signifying position. On entering language, the subject renounces his ready access to unmediated bodily pleasure, and this desire is henceforth taken up by the signifier. "I" is an "other", a doubling of the subject located in the presence of the "shifter"; those pronoun forms that designate singular and multiple identities simultaneously.

The new subject addressed by Kristeva's form of "materialism" recognises the limits of consciousness and the ego, and values process over the specular economy that produces a product. This subject-in-process is represented neither in narrative (which like the discourse of the hysteric suffers from reminiscence); in metalanguage (a paranoid position which establishes subjective unity by expelling the bad object from knowledge - and which both Lacan and Hegel maintained in different ways),⁹¹ nor in the writing of the obsessional whose theorizing that ignores the body or social practice mimes "the dissolution of all positions". (RPL: 97) The good-enough text with its good-enough subject is for Kristeva best represented by the logic of schizophrenia where the body becomes a sign. By such means, the transcendental ego that floated above the text like a ghost is banished to dusty archives, and the fabric of language itself envelops its subject in an ineluctable process towards jouissance, death, and renewal.

3. 3. II . "an unbearable monstrosity "

In the City of the Immortals the Roman who finally explores its buildings discovers a "silence [that] was hostile and almost perfect . . . 'This place is a fabrication of the gods,' I thought at the beginning. I explored the uninhabited interiors and corrected myself: 'The gods who built it have died.' I noted its peculiarities and said: 'The gods who built it were mad.'"⁹²

⁹¹ Judith Butler (1987) aligns Hegelian "positivism" with the paranoid "appropriation of drives, the logocentric resistance to the body that precedes conventional signification." (p. 232)

⁹² Jorge Luis Borges (1964), pp. 109-110.

The subject of the modern text is obsessed with madness, death, and disgust. From Podolski and Artaud, from the narratives of Judge Schreber and the Tatin sisters revived by Foucault, from the more sedate accounts of madness by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Doris Lessing, and Janet Frame to the delirium of Lautréamont and Hélène Cixous, and to the melancholic or aggressive suffering that ravishes Marguérite Duras or Sylvia Plath, modern writing drapes itself with a deathly blanket of permanent mourning. Or if not madness, then disgust and despair steep its discourse. Mutilated bodies, decaying cadavers, streets pasted with excrement and human blood, roses that mutate into corpses, and the lacerating experiences of incest are all mixed with a jubilant defiance: "only the criminal is truly free". Today we can watch on screens in our own homes world conflict orchestrated as spectacle; tomorrow purchase a magazine that gives recipes for Desert Rats.⁹³

Jean Franco would argue that this obsession with the cadaver in advanced capitalism is the product of "ascesis", a withdrawal of the metropolis from moral action in the face of *real* death in the Third World.⁹⁴ Kristeva's perspective is almost the reverse: overwhelming the unitary subject dissolves identity and unveils death and madness as the truth behind consciousness. A subject who is lost, beside himself, abandoned or shattered is an alien by virtue of the repressed which returns to claim its own. And when the process of writing desacralises the body and casts the subject out, he becomes irretrievably lost in the vast system of relations produced between the text, the unconscious, and society:

The representation of the "character" who becomes the place of this process is one that normative consciousness finds intolerable. For this character's polymorphism is one that knows every perversion and ad-

⁹³ From a local student publication issued at the time of the Gulf crisis which featured a collection of recipes appropriate for guerillas on the run. See "Gulf War Cuisine Special", *Critic*, Vol. 64, No. 4, (March, 1991), p. 9.

⁹⁴ See "Gender, Death and Resistance; Facing the Ethical Vacuum" in *Chicago Review*, Vol. 35, No. 4, (1987), pp. 59-79.

heres to none, one that moves through every vice without taking up any of them . . . [he has] no interiority and is constant rejection. (RPL: 156)

If polymorphism is not checked by the guard-rails that language provides, the body becomes a sign: "the final mutilation". (RPL: 132) Schizophrenia and psychosis are real possibilities for the subject who topples too far over into the semiotic. It is interesting that Kathy Acker chose to represent the ultimate sign of criminality in *Empire of the Senseless* by the figure of the tattoo which tore the body up and turned it into writing: the conceptual become flesh, the flesh, conceptual.⁹⁵ The tattooed person is a sailor with no home, forever passing between ports; the mad person loses his place in the family, and the corpse draws the shades all over the house, haunting the living with its uncanny sense of *déjà vu*.

Blanchot says of the corpse that it "knows no repose, and this is above all because it poses nothing, establishes nothing . . . it has no place . . . and in this dissolution attacks the possibility of a *dwelling place* even for us who remain . . . [the corpse] is also everywhere in the room, all over the house . . . We do not cohabit with the dead for fear of seeing *here* collapse into the unfathomable *nowhere* . . .".⁹⁶ Society wishes to maintain a separation between here and there, inside and outside, because it does not wish to acknowledge the tenuous hold of life and presence over undifferentiation. Once "death" inhabits those places we regard as most invulnerable however, we lose our bearings. Exteriors collapse into interiors, interiors become outside walls and boundaries; topography is forced to reconstruct itself. The subject-in-process, invaded with a familiar dread, has no place, is not "at home" in his place. But he is fascinated, too, with the writing that brings him to dread, for it comprehends loss and *jouissance*, and if it were not so he could not write. Even Hélène Cixous acknowledges its compelling attraction:

⁹⁵ Acker (1988), especially pp. 138-140.

⁹⁶ Blanchot (1982), p. 259.

"I'm afraid to hear myself speak.-What have you done?-I have known death.-Be frank.-Death has known me-Be frank-I have made love with death . . . It is no use carrying away the corpse, imprisoning it in its sarcophagus - the empty room is filled with death."⁹⁷

Textuality introduces death into discourse, and from the time of the avant-garde, this insertion of death and rejection is regarded by Kristeva as having been the purpose of modern literature. Those very aspects of negativity that capitalist ideology represses - our most intimate practices and desires - are displayed for all to view in the text. Nevertheless Kristeva is anxious to show that while the avant-garde deals more intimately with death, it does not (should not?) ultimately celebrate anarchy. Once its violence meets up with a signifying system, that system parcels it out over the whole "body" of the text. So the writer is not an axe-man in disguise, but someone who transposes social violence into the text, and by displacing it, creatively reinvests its deadly aims into new imaginary and discursive forms. Psychosis is still a risk for this subject, yet even the most radical of texts provide a structure that articulates rejection, and in giving it a form, stops it from destroying everything in its path. Death ought only to be at work in the text then at the level of a destruction of identity, and this destruction will be at its most thorough when *style* achieves maximum emphasis in language.

3.3.III. style

Writing is the interminable, the incessant. The writer, it is said, gives up saying "I".

Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature* ⁹⁸

If the subject never *is*, or if the subject and object begin to dissolve, the most common response is to bury the writing subject in *style*. Where language comes to us "burdened with an infinity of messages", the writer loses his authorial voice and is turned away towards this fragile place.⁹⁹ He finds himself faceless in

⁹⁷ Hélène Cixous, *Angst*, trans. Jo Levy (London: John Calder, 1985), p. 111.

⁹⁸ Blanchot (1982), p. 26.

⁹⁹ Preface to *Barthes: Critical Essays*, trans. Richard Howard (Evanston: Northwestern

a time of exile, in "a realm absolutely bereft of intimacy where beings seem absent and where everything one thinks one grasps slips away."¹⁰⁰

Many postmodern texts are at home with the disfigured topography that arises when objects are perpetually moving out of sight. In Beckett's *Worstward Ho*, for instance, this sense of slipping away appears as the generalised loss of the power of denomination: "Names gone and when to when".¹⁰¹ The seemingly placeless "dim void" Beckett constructs in this strange minimalist text is peopled with diminished, Dantesque shades. Two figures, backs bowed, plod "worstward" without receding, giving eloquent visual expression to Rilke's observation that man remains in an essentially depleted world as the one who is "forever taking leave."¹⁰² *Worstward Ho* is "absolutely bereft" but like all Beckett's places, its loss of intimacy effects a curiously rich world, charging "anonymity" and "silence" with desire. *Style* relates to this experience of renunciation: when the writer gives up saying "I", writing begins.

That master of style, Roland Barthes, claimed that the writer must die to his own individual feelings if he is to produce literature because it is "only form [that] permits us to escape the parody of feelings".¹⁰³ To speak of oneself, wrote Barthes, was to sink into "the poor and powerful language of the passions".¹⁰⁴ The writer must operate at a "zero degree", since the single approved textual sign of his presence is the validation of form. The activity of writing for Barthes was an implicit submission to the constituting energies of language and the accompanying loss of authorial control. We may never know "who" is speaking since writing is "that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the

University Press, 1972), p. xv.

¹⁰⁰ Blanchot (1982), p. 77.

¹⁰¹ Samuel Beckett, *Worstward Ho* (London: John Calder, 1983), p. 45.

¹⁰² R.M. Rilke, *Duino Elegies*, trans. J. B. Leishman and Stephen Spender (London: Hogarth Press, 1942), p. 81.

¹⁰³ Barthes (1972), p. xvi.

¹⁰⁴ Barthes (1972), p. xviii.

body writing."¹⁰⁵

In "Word, Dialogue, and Novel" Kristeva speaks of the author as "an anonymity, an absence", whose writing is founded on the gap that opens firstly *within* the subject and secondly, *between* the subject and his representations. Just how seductive is this loss of identity and facelessness? As we saw in Chapter One, Maurice Blanchot is one writer in tune with its subtle austerity; in fact he goes so far as to link art with unhappiness (or the consciousness of loss), since it "describes the situation of one who has lost himself, who can no longer say 'me,' who in the same movement has lost the world, the truth of the world, and belongs to exile, to the *time of distress* . . .".¹⁰⁶ Yet losing oneself has its own rewards. If the very act of consciousness is an act of positing an always uncertain identity, over and over again, perhaps there are moments when we wish to be delivered of this heavy responsibility. The prospect of losing consciousness of self in the play of signifiers is potentially an overwhelming experience, and it often sustains what can only be described as a form of death-wish, a desire to return to a state freed from the burden of self-reflection.

When I follow Kristeva through interminable landscapes silent as the grave, I sense an enunciating subject, a female voyager, lost in the architecture of her own text, overawed by its monumentality, and dazzled by the self-generating energy of signifiers that on one level, certainly do not require a *subject* to direct them. Reading *Séméiotiké* and parts of *Revolution in Poetic Language* is to lose one's identity and one's face, a gesture surely commensurate with Kristeva's stated intention, which is to empty out the place of the subject through a revolution in poetic language. The accompanying *jouissance* must be in essence then, a death-wish. Celebrating the loss of the self, Kristeva shares with Barthes an imperative that the critical writer must forsake the specular reproduction of

¹⁰⁵ "The Death of the Author" in Barthes (1982), p. 142.

¹⁰⁶ Blanchot (1982), p. 75.

his own experience for it is out of "extreme poverty, not our riches that we speak of the ineffable."

Following Blanchot, Barthes names the dilemma of writing the "Orphic" situation, "because the writer and Orpheus are both under the same prohibition, which constitutes their 'song': the prohibition from turning back toward what they love."¹⁰⁷ The narrative that guides Barthes here is the old one of sublimation. Man can only write authentically when he doesn't talk about what he wants to talk about. Writing is most "true" when it approaches the object of desire obliquely, and the "Mother" must remain permanently invisible even while she is the love-object that inspires all others. According to these rules of procedure, "Woman" may be a reservoir from which man pays *hommage* to Euridyce, but outside man's desire in language, she may not speak. As Simone de Beauvoir commented on the ideal offered to the writer by his "other" who holds the powers of life and death, "Woman condemns man to finitude, but she also enables him to exceed his own limits; and hence comes the equivocal magic with which she is endued."¹⁰⁸

And so we approach obliquely, and after many detours, the question of "woman". How is it that Kristeva's subject-in-process seems more attuned with variations of the Orpheus myth than with *The Second Sex*? Given that the subject in the unknown country we have just traversed does not exist, is there another side to the question of style which enables the writer to represent "herself" and the "Other Sex"?

3. 4. "Woman who is never there"

What, therefore, is important in the *study of Science*, is that one should take on oneself the strenuous effort of the Notion.

¹⁰⁷ Barthes (1972), p. xviii.

¹⁰⁸ de Beauvoir (1988), p. 180.

3. 4. I. the "woman effect"

The condition denoted by Alice Jardine as "modernity" demands as its indispensable aid a new space that has been designated "the woman effect" or "the feminine". Modernity announces the death of Man and the end of History, but looks for solace to the figure of the woman, unrepresentable and monstrous, but feminine nonetheless. More than any other contemporary writing, Jardine goes on to say, in French [male] writing "one finds an erotic merging and withdrawal across and through those spaces internal to signification, spaces that have been gendered as feminine."¹¹⁰ Barthes had visualised the writer as someone who played with his mother's body. Maurice Blanchot in his turn linked the experience of childhood fascination with a powerful maternal figure who exerted a fascinating attraction "because, appearing when the child lives altogether in fascination's gaze, she concentrates in herself all the powers of enchantment."¹¹¹ Whenever the experience of fascination recurred in later life, for these writers it was always accompanied by an intense moment of perception that seemed to cohere around some faceless, impersonal presence, immensely powerful, invisible, unknowable.

The reader does not have to work hard to realise that this indeterminate Someone is not God but the "phallic mother", that figure who represents plenitude, but also absolute power. To return to the mother through the imagination, or rather, through the writing practices of the modern text ("le pays où tout est permis") is to engage in a writerly kind of incest as well as to turn her body into a text. The (male) writer experiences *jouissance* because he is playing with something forbidden. At the risk of repetition, clearly this "something" does not exist

¹⁰⁹ Hegel (1977), p. 35; *RPL*, p. 11.

¹¹⁰ Jardine (1985), p. 233.

¹¹¹ Blanchot (1982), p. 33.

as a literal act but in the form of a mimicry. In fact, re-writing Nietzsche, we could suggest that even when he "gives himself" - he "'gives himself'". The male is so artistic. Or as Kathy Acker ironically expresses it: "The realm of the outlaw has become redefined: today, the wild places which excite the most profound thinkers are conceptual. Flesh unto flesh."¹¹²

Jardine implies that these new "incestuous" explorations of inner female spaces are part of modernity's challenge to the incest law, and so to the patriarchy. Is it not more likely though that one of modernity's indisputable effects is to sustain a "penetration" of "woman" under the Law? And that any thoughts of returning to some blissful, incestuous time before the Law existed are not just naive romanticism, but also ignore both the pain of incest for the *real* female subject, and the fact that the reverse fantasy - mothers taking sons - is not one that frequently appeals to women.

And what of Derrida, one of the first wave prophets of Modernity in France? How does he explore philosophy's boundaries and spaces? Deconstruction has often been claimed as an ally of feminism, but the terms it offers have their own drawbacks. Like Kristeva, Derrida's major preoccupations were to isolate and then to dismantle patriarchal structures encompassing the sovereignty of the self, the determinacy of meaning and the proscriptions of the Law. So when he can write of 'woman' that "There is no essence of woman because woman averts and averts herself from herself . . . For if woman *is* truth, *she* knows there is no truth, that truth has no place and that no one has the truth", he is taking the figure of woman and removing its bio-cultural content.¹¹³ Nietzsche's description of Woman as supreme artist of deception in the discourse of grammatology now functions as a permanently elusive signifier. This new displaced figure becomes

¹¹² Acker (1988), p. 140.

¹¹³ Derrida, *Eperons*, cited by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in "Displacement and the Discourse of Women" in Mark Krupnick ed., *Displacement: Derrida and After* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), p. 173.

a *metaphor* for Derrida's economy of difference, questioning the very structures of meaning and truth.

Furthermore, we discover that "woman"/woman is still an object in the eye of the male subject. Spivak's survey of *Glas* provides evidence that its two columns (labelled "Hegel" and "Genet" respectively) were separated by a slit in between to represent a woman's genitals and so took the shape of a fetish, allowing "the subject both to be and not to be a man - to have the phallus and yet accede to dissemination".¹¹⁴ Another image used in Derrida is the hymen. A structure somewhere between desire and its fulfillment, the hymen is the metaphor *par excellence* of an elusive style of writing whose effects are neither one nor the other.

What is the end result of these images that are invariably expressed in the language of male (heterosexual) desire? As Spivak concludes, they indicate that "man can problematise but not fully disown his status as subject."¹¹⁵ The image then, is never uncomplicated, nor is it pure sitelessness, without an inherited set of meanings. How does Kristeva fare in all of this? What use does she make of these inherited meanings that cling to the woman-effect? She certainly doesn't invite us to witness the spectacle of the woman's sex organs in the unabashed way that Derrida does, for example, nor does she imitate Lacan's arrogant imperialism when he looks at Saint Teresa. Neither does she play directly with the woman's body in an exhibitionist, self-pleasuring way as does Irigaray. Rather she insinuates that "negation of the object in its alterity as an 'independent life'; [and] the introduction of this amputated object into the knowing subject . . . " (RPL: 133) must be *refused*. To what extent the object in its alterity may be equated with the "woman effect" remains to be explored in the final sections of this chapter.

¹¹⁴ Spivak in Krupnick ed. (1983), p. 177.

¹¹⁵ Spivak in Krupnick ed. (1983), p. 173.

3. 4. II. transposing the sexual struggle

The text, it has been established, is the site of an estranging topography that engenders multiple transpositions. In the essay "Instances du discours et altération du sujet", (RLP: 315-35) Kristeva examines the transformations undergone by the subject as reproducing the struggle between the sexes. Mobile indicators of subjectivity, (RLP: 317) pronouns are read as transitory stases that the text often sweeps away. Reading *Les Chants de Maldoror*, Kristeva finds that the entry of the drives into language eclipses the subject at the level of enunciation: "je" becomes internally divided between a "tu" and an "il". (RLP: 316,7) This division of the subject into "others" signifies that he can occupy at one and the same time "all the positions [or moments] of discourse." (RLP: 317) Using Jakobson's term "shifters", she explains that they "translate the code in the message, the process of the *énoncé* in the process of the *énonciation*, the diverse protagonists of one in the other and vice versa." (RLP: 317) The ground between I and an other becomes "the terrain of a struggle"¹¹⁶ which repeats the thetic, positing moments of language, destroys these moments, and ends by creating a new, mobile form of identity. Reading Kristeva, I recognise my own position to be an unstable one - divided between an ego who judges and a subject - in - process moving between one form of subjectivity and another. Intentional (female) actor one moment; deprived of agency and sex in the next, "my" interactions with the Kristevan text comprise vulnerability as well as a need to master. In a manner of speaking, the reading process itself acts out a form of sexual struggle. But how desirable is a struggle between protagonists that always ends in slavery or death?

Crucially, Kristeva acknowledges that the difference between the two pronouns can be correlated with sexual difference, and every time the pronominal polarity is disturbed, it results in a change in the sexual conflict. Conversely, a change in

¹¹⁶ See Cixous (1985): "The worst is upon me. This is it: the scene of Great Suffering. During this scene the impossible takes place: my death attacks me, life panics and splits in two; one life tears at the other which has it by the throat, biting. You struggle. The body breaks, the sky shatters, the scene bursts into flames. You fall and the earth is no longer there." (p. 7)

the balance of power may initiate an alteration of the pronouns. The pronominal struggle corresponds to the sexual battle where the "other" is the "other sex", and where the most primal other is the mother, illustrated in Lautréamont's symbol of the ocean. But as the "other sex", the mother who "se joue" does so only indirectly. She never was the direct subject for Lautréamont, never "the one who . . .", but rather a force of negativity who decentred the one who said "I". While recognising his aggression towards the maternal, Kristeva at the same time rationalises the mother's alterity by referring the reader to an earlier passage where it is argued that the thetic moment (which presupposed separation from the mother) depends on "its always absent 'addressee'". (RPL: 208) In other words, the Other sex has to be absent for language to site itself. For this reason there ought to be no essences or egos at work in the text. Lautréamont's terror of the maternal body is somehow justified by this apparently self-evident truth. For Kristeva has no intention of capitulating to an overtly feminist form of analysis at this point, and quickly transposes the battle between the sexes back into the play of differences in the signifying process. Perhaps if sexual difference had been distinguished from sexual struggle without valorising the latter, the notion of language as internalising difference could have been retained, but a difference now established through mutual respect rather than endless conquest. Here, language engulfs the female body in order to master it. Indeed, even the feminine nature of the semiotic is fundamentally destructive; threatening subjective identity, ravaging the landscape, and laying bare every form of habitation. It is not until later in her oeuvre that the reader discovers a new perspective on relationships and speech that allows for mutuality and transformation.

Further, Kristeva insists that the text "maintains the 'other' as the *necessary hypothesis* to demonstrate the fact that the 'Other' is producible in discourse and analysable in the text." (RLP: 329, my emphasis.) The other isn't a familiar entity or readable name in the text, since the text exposes its very processes of

formation, thereby turning the space of identification into a space of play that resists domestication. (*RLP*: 331) No longer an enunciation, the multiplication of shifters results in a "chant" or a "rhythm" that prevents the place of the other from housing an identity. We can therefore deduce from the above reasoning that the sexual relationship expressed as a polarity between "I" and "you" doesn't exist, which is not quite the same as saying that woman does not exist, since if the other is a category, a "necessary hypothesis", then theoretically it can be occupied by either sex. Perhaps there is a sense here in which Hegel's master/slave polarity is being subverted (theoretically), and the position of master which de Beauvoir had equated with the masculine may not therefore be immutably fixed, but subject to dissolution, doubling and differing from within. All the same, given the history of woman's marginality in relation to the symbolic, it is difficult to see its narrative written substantially differently in Kristeva's reading of Lautréamont.

Later, Kristeva turns to Mallarmé on the same question. For Mallarmé, woman was a metaphor for *jouissance*, and here he followed the conventional pattern of narrative in the West that figured a male hero who played the role of the subject but never acknowledged sexual passion for an other, while his feminine counterpart assumed her sexual vulnerability without asserting subjecthood. In this all too familiar role, woman exists as that strange boundary creature on the edge of nature and culture. Lacking an authoritative form of public speech, she depends on the authority of the Law which will accord her respect by turning her into an Ideal: Woman as Mystery. Kristeva has scant respect for woman's indirect support of transcendence. Determined to do something about this covert maternal power, Kristeva suggests that the liberatory way out is to make every subject participate in feminine *jouissance* (the coming of the semiotic into language), thus bringing into the light the mother's forbidden sexual pleasure and appropriating it. The forbidden place is then no longer voiceless, or inhabited by a faceless Someone, but lives on as a "chant" in the subject of

writing. Yet this does not mean giving real woman a real voice, since the language and the subject here are not normative or communicative, but semiotic; and since the latter's presence in discourse still depends on the suppression (as sublimation) of *actual* (or sexual) *jouissance*: "*That is to say that the text exists to give a language and thus a subject to jouissance.*" (RLP: 491) Kristeva's anti-metaphysical gestures go hand in hand therefore, with a devaluation of female identity. For the privileged subjects of her text are men fascinated by the *gestures* of femininity but frightened by real women.

So Mallarmé's text becomes the first "ambiguous and prudent" attempt to "transpose sexual *jouissance* and its relation to procreation into a text, at all its levels." (RLP: 495) Yet despite his attempts to give *jouissance* a discourse, he could never extricate himself from the figure of woman as fetishistic mystery within the claustrophobic limits of the domestic family; writing, for example, of his dead mother with a fascination which linked *jouissance* with a dread of the feminine. Commenting on Mallarmé's fetishism, Kristeva makes the revealing remark that the "subject of poetic language is in a certain sense a man who recognises himself as a woman but does not wish to be one." (RLP: 600) This subject has assimilated the woman to himself as a *place* or an enunciative position. The sexual "cut" (that is, the social process of castration that puts the seal on sexual difference) has been replaced with an infinite number of breaks and displacements in language. A curious remark, one would think, for a woman to make. Where does Kristeva herself stand in relation to the man who doesn't want to be a woman? Surely not a neutral observer, anyway. It is impossible to determine to what extent she has identified with Mallarmé's identification, and to what extent she might consider herself as sacrificial "object" in this strange transaction. But whatever the outcome, at the most obvious of levels I see little in these analyses to suggest that woman is any more than an "amputated object" that the "masculine" subject has appropriated in order for language to achieve an endless productivity.

As Irigaray reminds us in her reading of Plato, the house of being (whether constructed by humanism *or* by a science of semiotics), requires that the female body be estranged and silenced in order to let the body of language speak. In bringing woman from the opaque shadows where she had been left by philosophy and narrative, Kristeva seems no more capable of giving her a voice of her own than do her male contemporaries. And yet there is within *Revolution in Poetic Language* some excess that does not quite accord with the appropriative gestures of Modernity. Kristeva's enunciative position is, like that of Lautréamont's protagonists, an ambivalent one. Although ultimately poetic language is the privileged limit, there are times when the text clearly gestures towards a lived form of femininity. Here she is in the concluding chapter:

On the one hand, an enjoyment which does not verbalise itself but lodges in the frayages and stases of the drives; on the other hand a language which is always that of others: between these two borders of "not yet" and "not that", in the throws of a heterogeneity, in-formulable or else lost as such as soon as formulated, passing immediately from one into the other, the woman is the utopic but privileged addressee of the text. As much as she wonders how to speak that which the social-filial code does not represent of her joy, she listens to poetic rhythm. As much as she wants to make herself subject of her enjoyment and not only a reproducer or repeater of already made languages, she asks herself what sets symbolism in motion. As much as her enjoyment does not have an object but, trans-symbolically produces itself from its rupturing, the woman is fascinated ["se fascine devant"] by the process of objectivity in all that is *practical*, and thus also in ["devant"] the text. (RLP: 614)

This quite lengthy passage is the closest Kristeva takes us to a sense of where "her" position might be. It requires the reader to visualise a representation of woman as always inhabiting a borderline position. Lodged in the drives, speaking the language of "others", neither one nor the other, she is the privileged (but silent Other) that compels language to go beyond itself. So far then, woman's evanescence is valorised and textualised. Woman is *the* stranger. But reading

further, what interests me are the discrete markers that indicate there is, simultaneously a consideration of real identity occurring. "As much as she wonders how to speak"; "As much as she wants to make herself [a] subject": these are signs that witness a subject of enunciation not effaced by poetic language, but engaged in an effort to establish a critical distance for (feminine) analysis to occur. The customary image of woman gazing into the mirror is here transmuted into the woman who stands, "fascinated" in front of the *text*. Intellectual analysis, it seems, gathers up the feminine energies of narcissism, and through a distinctively nuanced and self-implicating style, transfers them to the imaginary realm of poetic language, where its subjects are free to fly uninhibited, so long as they don't forget their practical streak which keeps them objective analysts of textuality.

3. 4. III. the (female) theorist as hysteric

Even in that telling passage, however, there is a refusal to people her text with a domestic scene where Oedipal characters reflect back our imagined sense of ourselves to us. Woman forgoes her mirror and loses herself in the spectacle of the text, a gesture I suggest, that is consonant with *hysteria*:

The glance by which I identify an object, a face, my own, another's, delivers my identity from *frayages*, nameless dread, noises preceding the name, the image-pulsations, somatic waves, color frequencies, rhythms, tones. Intellectual speculation derives from this identifying, labelling glance: the hysteric knows something of the process when, endlessly unable to find a sufficiently satisfying mirror, she finds herself at last in the theory itself - target of all sensible and senseless intentions, shelter where one can *know without seeing oneself*, for one has relegated to another (philosophical contemplation) the problem of representing an . . . identity.¹¹⁷

"One can *know without seeing oneself*": is this modest and discreet desire the sign of an enunciative position? That is, the desire to find a place from which to

¹¹⁷ Kristeva, "Ellipsis on Dread and Specular Seduction", trans. Dolores Burdick. *Wide Angle*, Vol. 3, No. 2, (1979), p. 42.

Speak where we are already spoken? Perhaps it indicates the desire to wake up in someone else's dream? If so, whose dream might that be, and what does "intellectual speculation" deliver us from?

"Hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences" wrote Freud, quoting his colleague Breuer. Anna O. dubbed psychoanalysis "the talking cure" because in learning to talk to her analyst, to reminisce in front of someone who listened, she discovered a cure for hysteria. Hysterics believed themselves to be the victims of early childhood traumas (usually sexual). Sometimes they failed to achieve sexual maturity, refusing passive vaginal sexuality in favour of a "masculine" orientation to the clitoris. Unable to identify satisfactorily with either parent, every mirror-image encountered provided only a strange and estranging double, mimicking the hysteric's bisexuality. The patient was "cured" when the transference achieved through therapy enabled her (or him) to name the symptoms initially identified as the problem (a cough, a discharge, anxiety phobias), as psychic or textual manifestations of a resistance to normal sexuality. More particularly, hysterics are those who are feminine, but deny their femininity (as sexual difference), imagining a perfect and uninterrupted fusion with the mother. ["I know, but just the same".] Such a refusal, according to Freud, lead to the emergence of the somatic symptom that stood in for the original "trauma", and which in Lacanian terms amounted to an imperfect transition from imaginary to symbolic.

The relevance of hysteria for us here is that the "body of the hysteric becomes her text",¹¹⁸ and inasmuch as the (female) writer is a hysteric, analogously, her writing is "masculine": doubled and estranged from its originating feminine body. Naming the theorist as hysteric thus illuminates one of the fundamental dilemmas for a female intellectual like Kristeva, who finds her female body so estranged from itself that "home" must finally be sought within the text of theoretical discourse itself. Intellectual speculation then becomes Perseus' shield used

¹¹⁸ Mary Jacobus (1987), p. 197.

to deflect Medusa's terrifying image, a deflection that often removes a space for an imaginary dialogue between reader and writer. Yet the shelter afforded by theoretical discourse is a transitory and ephemeral identity for the subject, especially when confronted by modern literature which re-opens the whole problematic of hysteria as a doubling or split identity that the mirror cannot contain.

The failure of the mirror is referred to in "L'engendrement de la formule", (*Sém*: esp. 286-8) and although this is an early text, its comments on the estranging effects of poetic language on identity are germane to the larger questions of identity under discussion in *Revolution in Poetic Language*. We know already that a recognisable form of doubling first occurs with the intuition of the symbolic at the mirror stage. It could be suggested that when this phenomenon of doubling occurs within the text so that it becomes both product ("phenotext") and process ("genotext"), it gives birth to the phenomenon of the hysterical body. Figure for the text's estranging excess, the hysterical body is a lure ["un leurre"] that pathologically mimics the hysteric's "bisexuality". And the reason the text's monstrosity "affronts the mirror" is because it transgresses the laws of the *seen* ["le vu"/"la vue"]. Its "eyes" see neither itself, nor the *signifiante* that produces it, since its true image is to be found in the unconscious. What we have before us then, is the spectacle of the inconceivable. Like the hysteric endlessly dissatisfied in front of the mirror, the text is permanently estranged from itself, never settling into a final reflection.¹¹⁹

Now we know that if the correct sense of spacing is not established during the mirror phase of human experience, and if the explosive motility of the subject is

¹¹⁹ Writing on the notion of "auto-affection" which is to be distinguished from narcissism, Derrida defines it not as the phenomenon of self-presence, but as that which "produces sameness as self-relation within self-difference . . . [which] produces sameness as the nonidentical." And again: "When I see myself, either because I gaze upon a limited region of my body or because it is reflected in a mirror, what is outside the sphere of 'my own' has already entered the field of this auto-affection, with the result that it is no longer pure." Derrida (1973), pp. 82, 78-9. This outside is for Kristeva and Lacan the Other.

not provided with a stable imago, psychosis will eventuate. Kristeva tells us that the mirror stage "produces the 'spatial intuition' which is found at the heart of the functioning of signification - in signs and sentences." (RPL: 46) But when the text doubles under the generative energies of *signifiance*, the Other returns within the subject, causing massive dislocation and estrangement. Like all good women we need our mirrors for narcissistic gratification, indeed for healthy development, yet to remain a prisoner to the fixtures that tether us to a purely visible material world is to forego the opportunity to embark on an adventure that would have us revalue "all that is practical".

3. 4. IV. "a material girl"

To what extent does Kristeva surrender the "problem" of femininity to theoretical discourse? In discussion with Louise Burchill conducted in Paris in June 1984, she comments on the way her writing had become more personally marked over time:

A transformation is, I think, entailed, firstly, in the greater importance assumed by a personal implication in my theoretical work. In my earlier work I sought, despite all, a kind of neutrality of enunciation. This was never pure - implied in the interweaving of genres and theory there was always an extremely large personal element; but from a stylistic point of view, from the point of view of a more immediate implication on the lexical, the syntactical, the stylistic level, this was less evident. The idea of, the desire and the ambition for a certain neutrality were maintained, whereas this neutrality is now more and more effaced and the personal implication very large. ("TLW": 23)

We can only speculate on the extent of "an extremely large personal element", but it clearly involves an ironic re-reading of conventional feminine gestures that doesn't so much eliminate as supplement their validity. "Practical", "material", and "experience" are all words that have been traditionally applied to women. It is intriguing to find them played on and transposed into contexts where they acquire strange new associations. The word "dédoublement" for instance can be read as a doubling introduced by the semiotic apparatus through

signifying differentials so that the sense plays on splitting in two, dividing, and the unfolding of cloth. (RPL: 220) Leon Roudiez refers to the image of the text as fabric in his introduction. According to Webster it is a texture, "'a disposition or connection of threads, filaments, or other slender bodies, interwoven'". (RPL: 5) At different points Kristeva defines the text as interwoven and intersecting threads ["fils"]; (RPL: 148) a "linguistic texture" ["tissu"]; (RPL: 154) a splintered "linguistic fabric" ["sa trame linguistique"]. (RPL: 228) Her theory is a "materialist" one, but lest the reader imagine that the text was identifying too closely with women's experience, then a practice was always social: "Experience is not Practice", we are reminded. (RPL: 195)

Concluding the theoretical section of *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Kristeva makes the following remark: "The ethical cannot be stated, instead it is practiced to the point of loss, and the text is one of the most accomplished examples of such a practice. Mallarmé writes: 'I revere Poe's opinion, no trace of a philosophy, ethics or metaphysics will show through, but let me add that it must be *included and latent*.'" (RPL: 234, my emphasis) Traces of personal enunciation then, are "included and latent", projected on to the screen of the text as it were, *from a distance*. Why insist that "the ethical cannot be stated"? What is Kristeva's objection to making a position statement? I cannot insist enough that to do so, to present a final product in language (for example, ethics), is for her to deny the negativising qualities of poetic language which destroy all fixed positions. Whenever we traverse a discourse (philosophy, another language, a genre, another subject's speech), we have an erotic relation with the other that can only be mastered as an "amputated object" by the consciousness at a cost. The ambivalence engendered by the drives that stream into poetic language projects one of the most intense forms of "strangeness" and "alterity" imaginable, because it is the other we have repressed ("the [m]other tongue", as Jane Gallop said). But this kind of strangeness that the text discovers and displays only consists in a moment of textual negativity: "when the stranger (discursive or national)

wishes to fix himself as identity, value, continent . . . the process which drives the text refuses him this fixity and indicates that strangeness *does not exist*, except as a cause of process (as negativity)." (RLP: 542-3)

The text is hostile to the stranger who searches it to find and hypostasize an identity, and if his search is frustrated, accuses it of "racism". Its drive-based violence can be seized by reactionary ideology, but in actuality the text dissolves all identities. Which brings us, briefly, to the question of feminism. "Racism" here could quite profitably be exchanged for "feminism". When the feminist comes looking for an identity and a vindication, what does she find? That strangeness privileges no unitary identity, champions no oppressed class or sex, stands up for no-one. It accuses "feminism" of being reactionary in response to the feminist label of "sexist" and accepts no political programme other than analysis of itself as the hidden (semiotic) potentiality of speech. Perhaps the only sort of identity it sustains is that of "woman who is never there":

A feminist practice can only be negative, at odds with what already exists so that we may say "that's not it" and "that's still not it". In "woman" I see something that cannot be represented, something that is not said, something above and beyond nomenclatures and ideologies."¹²⁰

Elizabeth Grosz in commenting on this passage, suggested that Kristeva viewed feminism as "a negative and reactive counterstruggle against sexism. It does not provide the materials needed for developing alternatives. Its function is to say 'no' to this or that view, opposing what exists, without actively contributing something new".¹²¹ But this is a mis-reading which ignores the effect Kristeva was aiming for throughout the whole article that she entitled "la femme, ce n'est jamais ça". What characterises the above passage is the obvious indebtedness to negativity, which could be seen as a constant denial of fixed positionality and

¹²⁰ Kristeva, "La femme ce n'est jamais ça" in Marks and de Courtivron eds. (1981), p. 137.

¹²¹ Grosz (1989), p. 166.

identity "above and beyond nomenclatures and ideologies."¹²² Written at the height of Kristeva's dialogue with feminism, she adds that there are certain men who understand what this negative procedure means, as does the "modern text". At the same time, she argues against a naive kind of feminism that expects a belief in identity (which she names as the reverse of "phallocratism"). Women have to be able to link negativity and ethics. In this sense, saying no ("not yet", "not that") is an exemplary activity on all levels of social intercourse that invest themselves in a practice, and probably the *only* practice that Kristeva could conceivably support as "feminist".

It could be suggested that as the semiotic is to the feminine, the feminine is to Kristeva's reading of the semiotic in *Revolution in Poetic Language*. In the same offhand way that the pre-Oedipal phase is labelled "feminine": "ou si on veut", (RLP: 604) and in the same way that this phase as the semiotic is an "already structured" one; speaking from the place of a woman appears in a similar apparently offhand gesture: "ou si on veut". Surreptitious, established after the fact, always already structured through the symbolic activity of separation and differentiation, but present as a potentially challenging alterity and strangeness, the presence of the feminine mimes, *in the fullest sense of the word*, the semiotic's functioning.

Bolstered by the feminine strategy of mime, Kristeva can then take on herself the "strenuous effort of the Notion". What astonishing arrogance. And what a "playing with fire" if theoretical rhetoric (as mastery) fails! This appropriation of Hegel is symptomatic of a more aggressive kind of vision, traditionally relegated to the "stronger sex". I acknowledge the solitary and indeed vulnerable position being articulated here, and the enormous intellectual energy that needs to be

¹²² I think that Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak would concur with my reading of Kristeva at this point. See her article "French Feminism in an International Frame", where she describes Kristeva as speculating about a woman's discourse "by way of the negative". (p. 145) First published in 1981 and republished in Spivak's *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1988), pp. 134-153.

expended simply to live up to that exorbitant challenge. And yet, doesn't Kristeva displace Hegel as soon as she quotes him? Doesn't she change his place? There may well be a radical difference between Hegel's use of these words and Kristeva's. If we accept her reading of woman as being indispensable to the social contract but simultaneously marginalised by it, a marginalisation all too evident in the male intellectual world Kristeva belonged to, then for a woman to take on "the Notion" had additional resonance far beyond what Hegel had in mind. If we are willing to agree that women may sublimate differently than men, are less interested in the purely theoretical, and are generally sustained by a more intimate sense of their own bodily existence, then the Notion becomes differently "strenuous".

It inhabits us other-wise, and Kristeva is keenly aware of this difference which manifests itself in a flash of recognition: just when everything seems the same we are suddenly aware of another voice speaking quietly from a distance, changing the place of things. With woman, the Notion comes to stand on the boundary between the world of the body and the world of signs: an impossible, risky place "raging with intelligence". (*RLP*: 616) But this head-on challenge to Hegel and the humanism he represents requires that any exploration of the feminine be conducted as the discrete underside of a larger inquiry, lest the totality be too harshly dismissed as "racist". Unsatisfied as I am by the equally hasty dismissal of "reproduction", "sexuality" and finally, woman and her experience; estranged as I travel through her highly textualised landscape; I nevertheless admire the enormous conceptual edifice that has been constructed: "a monumental challenge to all of us", as Alice Jardine remarks.

In conclusion, Kristeva's writing of "herself" into the text is deliberately "asymptotic". When her discourse takes a recognisably feminine turn, it steps cautiously back from its usual breathtakingly ambitious, stylish, and self-conscious voice to become "modest" and "chaste". Any form of personal enuncia-

tion is always in the form of a trace: an ironic reference, a displacement, or a form of ventriloquism. A ventriloquist *throws* his voice, transferring it from the register of one body to that of another. So too with the enunciative strategy of *Revolution in Poetic Language*. Speaking through the register of the text's formal structures is another voice, another position. Ironic, dislocated, ambivalent, yet passionate, unannounced it transposes the text into the estranging site of one subject's (feminine) desire. In so doing, it inscribes the speech of a female intellectual as a temporary dwelling within a primary discourse on poetic language and the pleasures of homelessness. That such strange pleasures were unable to be wholly sustained by Kristeva became increasingly apparent however, and the turn to a more marked form of personal enunciation and the re-introduction of the notion of transcendence will constitute the subject of discussion in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

"INTO THE CELLAR OF THE NATIVE HOUSE": NARCISSISM, ABJECTION
AND LOVE

4. 1. Introduction

Around the same time that *Revolution in Poetic Language* was published in France by Seuil, *des femmes*, a feminist publishing enterprise, released Kristeva's diaristic account of her travels in China in 1974: *Des Chinoises*. Its intensely personal response to the Chinese cultural revolution represents the underside to the arguably dispassionate accounts of subjectivity presented in her doctoral thesis. Kristeva had travelled to China with Roland Barthes, Philippe Sollers, Marcelin Pleynet, and Francois Wahl, and represented herself on the first evening the party arrived in Peking as "an eternal stranger . . . Ill at ease in a group of men. Neither Asian nor European, unrecognized by the women and detached from the men." (ACW: 157-8) Even while later wishing to distance herself from some of the naive and ethnocentric shortcomings of her Chinese travel-logue, Kristeva nevertheless here offers the reader a more *familial* subject of enunciation.

In *Revolution in Poetic Language* the language of the text is read as indifferent to the stranger's needs to construct an identity and inhabit a domesticated shelter. Instead, the topography of the text estranges comforting architectural structures and refuses a family romance, transposing its elements into the very processes of signification. Under this scrupulous regime, providing an ego for the author is prohibited: the place of the subject is a mobile positionality, and if it were to be filled with an authorial presence would result in a turning away from the renewing effects of negativity and jouissance. Experience as Kristeva reminds us, is not *practice*. Ventriloquism then becomes a vital device, for in the form of transposi-

tion, it allows the writer a provisional strategy for throwing her voice across the veil of language. However, in reading *About Chinese Women* we hear a distinctly personal voice; we note the markers of the subject of enunciation, the structurings around "I", "we", and "them" that signify real identities and real places.

Gazing at a group of peasants in Huxian who have been assembled to welcome the Western visitors occasions the reflection: "Women. We have the luck to be able to take advantage of a biological peculiarity . . ."; (ACW: 14) and later: "So . . . one can think what one pleases, before these people. Beginning with oneself." (ACW: 65) The experience of cultural estrangement leads to a question of representation, to the relation between inscription and phenomenality: "Sitting *here* in front of the typewriter, trying to write about *my* experience in China". (ACW: 11, *my* emphasis) By and large, this diary is not self-conscious about the problematics of writing. Recognising that the peasants have an "indefinable stare" does not lead to an extended meditation on the abyss opened up by language, or to the need for dialogism. What interests me though, is this more or less unscrutinised representation of Kristeva's own desire; the way it settles around the homely anaphoras "*here* " and "*my* ". Probably the moment of this mode of writing is prompted by the distinctly uncomfortable experience of being an object in the eyes of a group of strangers (the peasants "return" the look she gives them); a discomfort as perceived object that produces a personal, autobiographical enunciation on the subject of women.

It is my belief that this turn to the personal equally marks the beginnings of a confessional history of estrangement and abjection, a history that finds its fullest expression in two important pieces of writing: "The Novel as Polylogue", an essay written in 1974¹ and *Powers of Horror*, first published in 1980. Kristeva's argument in *Revolution in Poetic Language* had been that if the mother remained

¹ First published in *Tel Quel*, No. 57, (Spring 1974), reprinted in *Polylogue* (1977), pp. 173-220; and translated in *Desire*, pp. 159-209.

mysterious and unattainable, her unexamined power would return as fetishism or psychosis. The tentative solution had been to insist that drawing the forbidden signified up over the bar and into language in the form of semiotic disturbances would defuse maternal phallic power, all the while adding to language a destabilising, feminine lining, the only permissible gesture acknowledged towards transcendence. In this fourth chapter I will suggest that when Kristeva begins to speak more insistently about the place of this "lost object", that is, when her discourse attempts to give the maternal (and women) a history and a home, it encounters horror and abjection; when she reflects on women's writing it is to be repelled by its bodily viscosity; and when she begins to speak of her own life history a terrifying image of the phallic mother shadows every page. Overwhelmed and burdened by a female materiality it had sought to introduce, Kristeva's discourse then finds itself in the uncomfortable position of having to appeal to more and more textually sophisticated means to keep the maternal at bay. What needs to be redrawn in the later work, one discovers, is the relation between transcendence and the body - whereas *Revolution in Poetic Language* announced the death of transcendence and the triumph of the semiotic body, a decade later that body is rearticulated in relation to a new "metaphysical" vocabulary. The subduction of the body in Kristeva's oeuvre does not take place, however, until the reader has encountered a series of narratives apparently predicated on intense hostility towards women.

Despite its estranging effects however, Kristevan discourse is complex, often maintaining a carefully orchestrated dialogism between valorising and denigrating the feminine. The pleasures and challenges of reading become more nuanced, until the text that most appears to lay waste to the maternal simultaneously offers a unique relation to the object, which the woman who is an intellectual may be in the most strategic place to articulate. By *Tales of Love*, which can be read as a celebration and reconstruction of the Ideal accompanied by a deconstruction of idealism, the place of woman may be more marginal than in

Powers of Horror, but the place of the female analyst is not. Even though Kristeva appears to make few universal claims for women or, indeed, for female intellectuals as a privileged category, her enunciation does suggest that a female analyst could be in an exemplary position to diagnose and treat individual and social crises today. One can hardly fail to ignore the self-implication that is being voiced here.

To my knowledge, drawing connections between a discourse that displays a greater personal content, a corresponding sense of abjection and antipathy towards the mother, and an increasingly inventive series of (anti)-phenomenological strategies developed to console this antipathy, has not yet been fully acknowledged by critics. Victor Burgin, Cynthia Chase, Barbara Creed, Elizabeth Grosz, John Lechte, Juliet Flower MacCannell, Jacqueline Rose, Jennifer Stone and others have in various ways outlined the Kristevan thematics of horror and abjection.² Grosz notes that the emphasis on psychoanalysis, especially the pre-Oedipal mother/child relation is a crucial factor in linking abjection with the maternal.³ In conversations with Louise Burchill and Rosalind Coward in 1984, Kristeva herself acknowledges a gradual effacing of neutrality in her work, and its more personally inflected style and scope. The autobiographical turn has equally been recognised by Madelon Sprengnether and Marianne Hirsch,⁴ although it is Jacqueline Rose who has made some of the sharpest observations on the connection between desire and thematics, thus: "Kristeva is also a self-diagnostician, and the psychic drive or investment of much of her writing can often be lifted straight out of her texts."⁵ My argument takes the element of self-

² Victor Burgin, "Geometry and Abjection" in John Fletcher and Andrew Benjamin eds., *Abjection, Melancholia and Love: the Work of Julia Kristeva* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 104-123; Cynthia Chase, "Primary Narcissism and the Giving of Figure with Hertz and de Man" in Fletcher and Benjamin eds., (1990), pp. 124-136; Barbara Creed, "Horror and the Monstrous Feminine: an Imaginary Abjection", *Screen*, Vol. 27, No. 1, (January-February 1986), pp. 44-69; John Lechte (1990); Juliet Flower MacCannell, "Kristeva's Horror", *Semiotica*, Vol. 62, No.'s 3/4 (1986), pp. 325-355; Jacqueline Rose (1986); Jennifer Stone (1983).

³ See her account of abjection, motherhood and love in Grosz (1989), pp. 70 ff.

⁴ Madelon Sprengnether (1990); Marianne Hirsch, *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

⁵ "Julia Kristeva: Take Two", in Jacqueline Rose (1986), p. 142. This remark of Rose's is

diagnosis further than Rose by suggesting that the inscription of personal desire in the Kristevan text colludes with a horror in and, paradoxically, a *celebration* of maternity.

Kaja Silverman perhaps comes closest to my own position at this point. In *The Acoustic Mirror* Silverman notes that anxiety concerning the maternal/semiotic matrix is accompanied in Kristeva's work by a romantic fantasy about the mother. This latter gesture, she argues, masks in reality a homosexual desire. Silverman's claim will be returned to later. For the moment though, let me say that while rejecting her final judgement, I do endorse the sense of ambivalence towards the feminine that one has in reading Kristeva. "The Novel as Polylogue" leaves us with the impression that woman has been banished to the shadows; in contrast, *Powers of Horror* is noticeably double-coded, its discourse circling between a formal argument that dematerialises a threatening maternal body, and a more surreptitious discourse privileging the speaking voice of the female intellectual. This second voice or position has been largely passed over by critics, I suspect, for two reasons. Firstly, it appears to run so counter to the often hostile surface discourse and secondly, because for the most part it is so coyly inflected. Further, it appears that this double reading becomes more consistent with the passing of time, and I examine its nature as it appears in texts like "Stabat Mater", *Powers of Horror*, and *Tales of Love* in later sections of the chapter. In the first sections, I will focus on those texts that begin to acknowledge personal desire, yet withdraw when the intimate space becomes too close; when the proffered comforts of home become estranging and threaten to overwhelm the subject and smother her own fragile identity.

While *Revolution in Poetic Language* regarded the site of estrangement as language itself, in later writing the focus on semiotics becomes less prominent. It

accompanied by the now notorious statement of Kristeva's in "Stabat Mater": "I desire the Law"; a desire which, Rose notes, was bound to be the ultimate effect of that earlier onslaught on the securing identity of the image, which Kristeva and the *Tel Quel* group had castigated throughout the 1970s as little more than bourgeois deceit."

seems in fact, as if the deconstruction of transcendence and the failure of an associated sense of space has given rise to a return of a *more intense* version of what that metaphysical discourse had repressed - the female body. What we increasingly discover is a thematic discourse on those disturbing borderline experiences undergone by the psyche during times of change or crisis. Now the figure of the black gaping cellar in Igitur's native house comes to stand for a *somatic symptom*. The reader finds that this new discourse explicitly plays on affective, as well as intellectual responses - with estranging consequences. *Revolution in Poetic Language* is marked by a problematising of the distinction between exterior and interior space but all the same, procedures of reading were still able by and large to establish a *distance* between the critical subject and the object of her investigation. The site of language seems conceptually remote, an estranging landscape "exterior" to the subject's embodied existence. In contrast, the journey that is offered the reader in a number of subsequent texts is a voyage to the psychic interior of the subject, where cartographic instruments measure and map *bodily architecture* and its imperfect mediation through culture and discourse. Suddenly the familiar shapes and shadows of our domestic interiors assume nightmarish proportions. But is this yawning phantasm at the bottom of the stairs real or imaginary? Does Kristeva invent abjection through rhetorical performance, or discover its existence? And if the latter, is there an end to her journey through the night? The publication of *Tales of Love* in 1983 suggests an answer in the affirmative. Here the figure of the "Imaginary Father" appears as the necessary support for love; an imaginary identity whose configuration as Kristeva tells it, alleviates estrangement and suffering by opening out the paranoid enclosures of narcissistic subjects to the loving embrace of the Other. It is in *Tales of Love* that an enunciative position is finally constructed that can bear the weight of estrangement without permitting its homeless subjects to be devoured; and it is this text that to my mind finally enables the "personal" voice of the female voyager to parcel out suffering and renewal over a social body no longer regarded as the ultimate threat to subjectivity.

4. 2. Narcissism and the lost object

I keep on asking questions.

Julia Kristeva⁶

My questions are my body.

Muriel Rukeyser⁷

"Write your self," exhorts Hélène Cixous, "Your body must be heard." And later:

Listen to a woman speak at a public gathering . . . She doesn't "speak," she throws her trembling body forward; she lets go of herself, she flies; all of her passes into her voice, and it's with her body that she vitally supports the "logic" of her speech. Her flesh speaks true. She lays herself bare. In fact, she physically materializes what she's thinking; she signifies it with her body.⁸

Cixous is inscribing a popular, perhaps even true myth about the way many women perceive themselves in relation to their bodies and to cultural productions. One reading of her text is to attribute it to a more or less conventional, even banal narrative of the feminine body. A second reading would be to examine how woman's position in language is marked by a somatic discourse. "My questions are my body," the hysteric complains, a confession that both fascinated Freud and gave him leave to constitute hysteria as the discourse of the woman *par excellence*.

Psychoanalysis is founded on a certain relation between woman, the body, and interior space. In *Totem and Taboo*, Freud argued that the origins of primitive society consist in laying aside pre-Oedipal incestuous relations; in *Moses and Monotheism*, he aligned cultural advancement with paternity and its command over sublimation and intellectuality in opposition to the maternal world of the

⁶ Powers, p. 92.

⁷ "Private Life of a Sphinx" in Hirsch (1989), p. 3.

⁸ "The Laugh of the Medusa" in Marks and de Courtivron eds. (1981), p. 251.

senses.⁹ Mary Jacobus shows us how Freud's attempts to remove all traces of "orality" from psychoanalysis originated with his anxiety that the narratives of his female patients were inextricably linked with maternal materiality.¹⁰ Perhaps the Freudian anxiety is nowhere more pronounced than in his essay on "The Uncanny". The mother's body is "heimisch" and "unheimlich", at once home and not home, a space desired but never attainable.¹¹ Read in this light, the space of interiority that englobes, and the space of exteriority that overruns its boundaries can in Freud stand as figures for an anxiety over maternal space. With Lacan, the mother/other distinction becomes more profound, since language is a place of lack permanently separated from her. Woman stands as the final guarantor of alterity, the Other of whom one can only speak about through the (lost) love letter, "Une lettre d' amour."¹² Kristeva writes within these equivalences even as she attempts (with varying degrees of success) to displace them. From 1974 until at least 1980, her texts produce a discourse that seeks to lead woman (as both phenomenon and figure, narcissistic ego and source of affect) away from comfortable residence in a house not entirely her own - language - to a borderline place of vertiginous interiority. For her readers, the journey marked out in her texts ends in estrangement, a fear of being engulfed, and an unrelieved suffering that no discursive structures irrespective of their sophistication, seem able to fully absorb or mediate. In exploring the topography of the body according to Kristeva, we will again employ the figure of the female voyager, but this time a greater sense of distinction will be maintained between the landscape travelled and the reader who is affected by, yet distanced from, this landscape.

⁹ See the following quotation from *Moses and Monotheism*: "this turning from the mother points . . . to a victory of intellectuality over sensuality - that is, an advance in civilisation . . .", cited by Naomi Schor, "Missing Mothers/Desiring Daughters: Framing the Sight of Woman", *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 15, No. 1, (Autumn 1988), p. 67.

¹⁰ Mary Jacobus (1987), p. 192: "This is the theorist's ruse in *Dora*. By suspending or abjecting the mother, Freud authors the immaculately self-conceived speculations of theory which always anticipate (by abjecting) the ocular demonstrations of the earthy maternal body."

¹¹ See Madelon Sprengnether (1990), p. 9.

¹² In "A Love Letter" Lacan plays on the merging of amour (love) and âmour (soul). For this connection between Lacan and altarity (Taylor's own neologism), see Mark C. Taylor, *Altarity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 151.

Precisely what place does Kristeva make for women in her work? Does she represent them as seeking affirmation and identity: the final solution? Or does she see them as aliens and strangers, somehow privileged by their marginality to the social contract? We all know the story of the Little Mermaid who out of her great love for a man exchanged her aquatic body for a human one, but was doomed to suffer terrible pain ever after. This narrative sprang to mind when reading Kristeva on the relation of women to culture: "Estranged from language," she comments, "women are visionaries, dancers who suffer as they speak." ("Oscillation": 166) Like hysterics, women only appear to be capable of relating to culture *symptomatically*. Their bodies act out what eludes their consciousness. And like Hans Andersen's mermaid, women walk on knives, bearing *within their bodies* the painful cost of moving from one realm (the "watery, aquatic, maternal element") to another (a place of differentiation, suffering, and love). In this sense, all women are female voyagers in perpetual transit over foreign lands in which they never quite feel at home.

To what extent does Kristeva really believe that women's writing is the "discourse of the hysteric"?¹³ Her assessments are often contradictory. The above remark on their status as exiles, for instance, was made alongside apportioning "a certain bisexuality" to all speaking subjects, which irrespective of gender allows them to playfully explore the whole range of signifying practices. The subject is universal, the realm of "subjecthood" inclusive.¹⁴ There is thus a telling and potentially alienating gap voiced here between the theoretical statement referring to the general case - "all speaking subjects" - and the more specific, gendered focus of "women". Even while the speaking subject's sexual identity reads as

¹³ In Juliet Mitchell, *Women: the Longest Revolution* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), p. 289. Mitchell is probably referring to Kristeva's article, "From Ithaca to New York". See the preceding discussion in Chapter One.

¹⁴ See the Translator's Preface to *Revolution in Poetic Language*, n.8, p. 234, where Margaret Waller points out that Kristeva includes "feminine subjectivity" within this general realm pertaining to the abstract features of the speaking subject.

secondary, it is undeniable that Kristeva has made some uncompromising judgements on women, sexuality, and language. In comparison to those male writers who know *jouissance* in language for instance, women writers by and large are viewed as producing narcissistic constructions of a biographical or imaginary nature that help shape an "ego". ("Oscillation": 166) In these terms, their domestic attachments clearly deny them a privileged place from which to explore the subtleties of writing as estrangement and renewal.

Three years later, the same division appears in a conversation with Françoise van Rossum-Guyon. On the one hand, Kristeva argues that "writing ignores sex or gender and displaces its difference in the discrete workings of language and signification (which are necessarily ideological and historical)." ("Talking": 111) Women have a "whole range of potential qualities " ("Talking": 112) from which to draw in the production of a writing that radically challenges identity. Once a form of writing is established that hypothetically ignores gender, however, Kristeva proceeds to criticise the *actual* writing produced by women for its narcissism and its imperfect relation to the symbolic. Contemporary women's writing emphasises "secretions and intestines, carefully disguised by the culture of the past but now on open display." ("Talking": 112) What Kristeva considers so objectionable here is the unmediated exhibition of female sexuality and the body. Where Irigaray would read women's "two lips" as the privileged sign of *jouissance* and would lyrically affirm the fluidity of female interiors, Kristeva's lips remain tightly sealed on such pleasures. When the topography of the (female) body is unveiled in her work, its oozing dirtiness and massive weight is seen as distressingly immediate. It is *too close* to permit the subject to imaginatively identify with the pleasures of loss and exile. Unlike Alphonso Lingis, she cannot mourn contemporary distaste for "our visceral and glandular depths, the inner coral reefs and pulsating channels of antennas and gyrating polyps".¹⁵ Probably she is only too aware of how such poetry is vulnerable to

¹⁵ "Orchids and Muscles" in *Exceeding Nietzsche: Aspects of Contemporary Nietzsche Interpretation* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 114.

parody, as, for instance, in the figure of A.S. Byatt's Leonora Stern, whose female landscape is "covered with sucking human orifices and knotted human body-hair."¹⁶ I do not know whether her contempt for the more embodied topography produced by women's writing is the product of the failure to differentiate herself sufficiently from the position taken by her male contemporaries, or whether it arises for other reasons. That she was not alone in these sentiments though, does lend a certain piquancy to the question of how a female intellectual represents the body - and herself - in discourse.

Surprisingly, Simone de Beauvoir held quite similar opinions. Like Kristeva she was preoccupied with female narcissism. Women who write

have often aptly described their own inner life, their experience, their own universe; attentive to the hidden substance of things, fascinated by the peculiarities of their own sensations, they present their experience, still warm, through savoury adjectives and carnal figures of speech. Their vocabulary is often more notable than their syntax because they are interested in things rather than in the relations of things; they do not aim at abstract elegance, but in compensation their words speak directly to the senses.¹⁷

We again recognise this as a canonical response to the kind of writing produced by women. Self-absorbed, incapable of distance or objectivity, women's flesh clings to their words and domesticates speech. It cannot creatively take up a relation to the sublime because it cannot *imagine* such a sublime might exist independent of a comforting maternal body. It is as if feminine interiority has extruded on to the surface of language, covering its clean and proper signifiers with a shiny visceral coating. Where does this ambivalent response come from? What makes it persuasive enough to seduce the texts and minds of two of the twentieth century's greatest women thinkers?

Some light is shed on this question when we examine the way many women

¹⁶ *Possession; A Romance* (London: Vintage, 1990), p. 246.

¹⁷ Simone de Beauvoir (1988), p. 719.

have explored the apparent antipathy between abstraction and sensation, body and mind, Mother and Father in their own lives. As de Beauvoir once remarked, "I grew accustomed to the idea that my intellectual life - embodied by my father - and my spiritual life - expressed by my mother - were two radically heterogeneous fields of experience which had absolutely nothing in common. . . . This imbalance, which made my life a kind of endless disputation, is the main reason why I became an intellectual."¹⁸ The body and the maternal have traditionally occupied the outer boundaries of conceptual thought. Persisting either as diametrically opposed to the world of abstraction or as irritating traces of empirical reality ("here"; "my") that must be bracketed out, matter and the feminine have been read as philosophy's waste(land). Here is what Naomi Goldenberg has to say on the relation of the body to discourse:

The maternal body I am talking about is alive in both male and female memories of the physical connection and dependency of infancy and childhood. This body-as-matrix is an experience that both men and women know but that women have been required to know better. Because adult women continue to live out of a body politic in their roles as mothers, caretakers, and supporters of the activities of men and children, women in general seem to be more conscious of the social matrix of which they partake, and which, in turn, partakes of them.¹⁹

Intellectual women - particularly those who have incorporated the speech of their fathers as a primary model - are aware of their debt to the maternal, but often continue to invest in a universal, disembodied discourse of knowledge and analysis. Kristeva writes out of this dilemma, despite her harsh dismissal of de Beauvoir. Her readings of idealism and metaphysics discover a hostility to the unknowable object at the heart of speech, a hostility that finds its analogue in an anxiety towards the other sex. Her response is to feminise language, but this admittedly revolutionary gesture still rests on representing the mother "as an

¹⁸ *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* (New York: Penguin, 1984), p. 41.

¹⁹ *Returning Words to Flesh: Feminism, Psychoanalysis and the Resurrection of the Body* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990), p. 36.

agency antipathetic to language and identity", who, with the semiotic, "muddies the clear waters of rational discourse."²⁰ Each successive move seems bound only to intensify the predicament. For when in "Polylogue" Kristeva begins to express a clear female (autobiographical) voice, the feminine entity of the semiotic that transforms the symbolic is suddenly superceded by the all-powerful Mother whom the symbolic must subdue. Moreover, the deliberate destruction of transcendent space now poses an insuperable dilemma, for it seems that space is the necessary prerequisite for psychic formation, not to mention a renewal of language. We cannot become subjects unless we separate from our mothers, but separation presupposes the very kind of distance that the semiotic comes eventually to eliminate. Sharing some points in common with Holbein's *The Corpse of Christ in the Tomb* which Kristeva discusses in *Black Sun*, the failure of transcendent space here comes to be identified with the subject's helpless anguish to see beyond a horizon that lowers to annihilate him. When Derrida deconstructs metaphysics, everything becomes a text. But when Kristeva deconstructs metaphysics, everything becomes a body; a body in the process of breaking up, a murderous body that must be put to death before it destroys *us*.

Our first intimations of intimacy and disgust, we are told, originate with the one who is responsible for our daily care. The maternal relation is the most primitive representation of intimate space, yet this relation opens on to a topography of estrangement. In *Powers of Horror* Kristeva suggests that writing is a metaphorical activity that stands in for an archaic pre-symbolic relationship with the mother and at the same time wards off the fear of its unmediated return: "The writer is a phobic who succeeds in metaphorizing in order to keep from being frightened to death; instead he comes to life again in signs." (*Powers*: 38) Through writing, the subject escapes from the intimacies of his first home. If he writes hard enough, he will escape falling back into *her* space. Blanchot's writer necessarily exiled from the comforts of home is familiar with the anxiety of being

²⁰ Silverman (1988), pp. 105, 106.

too close to the maternal. His textual "home" becomes the place where the primary, somatic relation of fusion and separation from the mother is both relieved and receives its most intensely symbolic (hence psychic) expression. It is the site where there is most chance for a subject to experience *jouissance* as a unique blend of sublimation and horror. According to this logic, if the image is lined with dread it is so because of the fear we have of being overwhelmed by materiality and the maternal. Not exactly our mothers as they exist here and now for us, but as we related to them in the transition from *infans* to speaking being. The symbolic is the realm where we put aside childish things and channel our incestuous and aggressive drives into language - hence "sublimation". It is, moreover, the only home we can henceforth expect, and where *words* protect us from absorption by the mother. But the transition is not water-tight, and so language is irremediably marked for Kristeva with evidence of the pre-Oedipal, an archaic stage where both subject and object are only beginning to coalesce around an identity. This stage is dominated by deep ambivalence towards the first love object as the emerging subject attempts to free himself from her. She becomes the "horror vacui", the Absolute beginning and end of space into which one can avoid falling only by endlessly representing forms, by filling the gap with fetishised "objects" - signs. The ensuing violence, hatred and terror of all that smacks of unmediated matter may be repressed in the unconscious, but these destructive affects, mediated through the symbolic, return both at various crisis points of human experience and in the literary text, the latter coincidentally affording, Kristeva argues, the only acceptable contemporary symbolic habitation for expressing, hence calming, such reactions.

Does maternity deserve such a bad press? Need it follow that a fear of intimate space invariably returns to the mother's body as its primary site of anxiety? And if the above anxiety is introjected as a cultural paradigm, how does it bear on the way we understand (and read) women? Clearly, Kristeva has not escaped those very antipathies she sought to overturn. She is still a victim to a primordial

vision of animosity towards the (female) body and an anxiety that this body will transgress the limits culture has prescribed for it. When she emphasises more explicitly the personal and the subjective, her negative critique of the Mother apparently increases *exactly in proportion to* that emphasis. The essay "The Novel as Polylogue" is, outside of *Powers of Horror*, one of the clearest examples of the relation between explicitly acknowledging the female subject of enunciation and a corresponding need to strike at fleshly maternal identity, depriving it of consciousness.²¹

Intellectuals who read Phillipe Sollers's novel *H*, claims Kristeva in the essay, are drawn to identify with it through a form of narcissistic fascination:

you talk about it, because *H* sends you into analysis; you assume its writer as an object of transference, as a character on your Oedipal stage . . . You tend to see *H* as a person, to fashion its negativity into a psychological or sociological case, and to search for an identity that is a threat to itself - and a threat to you." (*Desire*: 160)

These "phenomenological" reflections provide the pretext for Kristeva to talk about herself and her own identity; about why it is that she is now compelled to speak in French, and how Sollers's polylogical writing that plays with multiple signifying practices is able to have a disintegrative, yet renewing effect on her subjective identity. Her use of the metaphor "Yalta" represents both the historical reasons that led Kristeva to leave Bulgaria and take up a scholarship in Paris, and initiates a sequence of reflections on the nature of identity and its relation to history: "to the extent that I am allowed to use the pronoun 'I,' is to speak about my right to speak, in French . . . To put it bluntly, I speak in French and about literature because of Yalta. I mean that because of Yalta, I was obliged to marry in order to have a French passport and to work in France . . .". (*Desire*: 161)

²¹ See further the essay "Stabat Mater" (1976) republished in *Tales*, where Kristeva interweaves her own experience of pregnancy with a veneration of the Virgin Mary. "Stabat Mater" will be discussed later in the chapter.

The privileged figure of the female voyager that Kristeva takes on under Yalta is marginal precisely because the experience of exile can exist only on the edge of the imaginary.²² Subject to "death and violence", this estranged "not I", reminiscent of Freud's frontier or boundary creature,²³ inevitably cannot have the same placid relation to subjectivity entertained by those who are at home in their culture. Nor can it place the same optimistic faith in history as its socialist and capitalist signatories.²⁴ For if Yalta also represents obversely the triumph of the ego, it allows its subjects to bypass the estranging effects brought by a revolution in language:

Read Hegel as one might, the "ego," once exposed to the negative, ignores it and escapes more or less unscathed; complicity with, if not basis for Stalinism. It all begins with dogmatizing ideological struggle, then abandoning it and, finally, making up little protectionist "I's"- the convenient narcissisms of backward bourgeois "subjects," very much protected, indeed; but such a protection, generally speaking and allowing for a few exceptions, shields them from innovation, analysis, and history. (*Desire*: 161)

The subjects of criticism here, "little protectionist 'I's'", are narcissistic in that they refuse to open themselves to the kind of negativity and historical process on display in Soller's *H*. What offends Kristeva is the quality of *unmediated* personal experience residing in the bourgeois subject which must in her view be exchanged for the displacing and ultimately disintegrative effects of language. Clearly, part of the above hostility to the politics of the ego stems from Kristeva's experience of controlled socialism in Bulgaria. In an interview conducted with Jean-Paul Enthoven in June 1977, she claims to have seen in her home country the effects of the violent imposition of law under communism where the figure of the One, standing in for the family, society, or language enforces the exile of

²² Kristeva may here be using the imaginary in a somewhat pejorative sense to represent the *méconnaissance* of the ego. The mirror-stage experience, according to Lacan, sites the ego in a "fictional direction". See "The Mirror Stage", Lacan (1977), p. 2. Kristeva's later writing views the place of the imaginary more positively. See especially *Tales*.

²³ See "The Ego and the Id", SE XIX, p. 56.

²⁴ Although at this point Kristeva is referring to the socialist East European countries, by implication her critique of their exclusion of death and time as difference may in some respects be applied to Western Europe, particularly in its most Statist pronouncements.

the "other", whether the latter be political opposition, or a more generalised form of intellectual and cultural resistance.²⁵

But whatever the biographical explanation, the desire to deconstruct identity alongside an inclusion of the personal constitutes a major aspect of "The Novel as Polylogue". And the "personal" includes addressing the question of identity as a woman: "I was obliged to marry in order to have a French passport and to work in France . . .". Woman's ambivalent relationship to culture is nowhere so tellingly expressed as in this autobiographical confession. But the crucial question for this woman now a stranger in a country not her own concerns the issue of whether a relationship may be established between personal affect (as confession, for instance) and the music in letters (that is, the presence of semiotic affect in language). Undoubtedly, including the expression of subjective feelings in speech *is* a kind of affect. It humanises what could otherwise remain a remote, impersonal narrative. To describe oneself as "obliged to marry" and live in a foreign country is to admit then, to a sense of homesickness and alienation. Yet Kristeva is unable to let this form of confession stand on its own. Style must problematise the enunciations of a sexually marked subject, transforming her sense of exile into an affair with language, the universal mother tongue. And so confession merely provides the pretext for a discussion of a crisis in enunciation and its destabilising effects on identity. Not wishing to turn away from sexuality altogether though, Kristeva views the path to this problematised identity as lying through an appeal to maternal sexual pleasure, an experience that culture has generally wished to ignore.

If there is a sense in which criticism has refused the expression of subjectivity in analysis, it is also true that language and culture generally turn a blind eye to maternal jouissance.²⁶ Thus to read the figure of the mother as the source of a dis-

²⁵ "Julia Kristeva: A quoi servent les intellectuels?" in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, (June 20, 1977), p. 99. Also note her use of the phrase "les verrous [bolts, bars] de la rationalité", p. 103.

²⁶ One of the emphases of feminist critical theory, particularly that writing taking its cue from

integrative kind of *jouissance* working its way into language by defying the boundaries of reason and propriety could be the perfect opportunity to reinscribe woman in the social contract as well as preserving her alien status. Moreover, to speak of woman's desire might also allow for a new dialectics of intimate space to be elaborated. But what would this signify for the female voyager's undeniably explicit involvement in her text? As we have mentioned, working in concert with the maternal as privileged representation of the semiotic is a substantial personal implication. As Jane Gallop observes, Kristeva deliberately emphasises narcissistically her self, body, and her history in outlining a theory.²⁷ Gallop terms these "self-pleasuring reference[s] to her own body."²⁸ On the one hand then, narcissistic reference turns paternal critical law upside down, since traditional practice has not usually encouraged an autobiographical commentary or theoretical writing. On the other, attributing the site of upheaval in language to maternal sexual pleasure is equally challenging to the symbolic. But can we regard Kristevan textual strategy in "The Novel as Polylogue" as privileging women and their quest to find a home of their own in language? I think not. In fact, the performative intent that puts "woman" into practice here is not ultimately to affirm feminine subjectivity in its familiar sociological or psychological aspects, even if the effects of reading "Polylogue" *are* experienced "somatically". In reality, the presence of narcissism evoked through the text's disclosure of biographical detail sparks off a train of analysis that leads to an

psychoanalysis, has been to talk about maternity in terms of pleasure as well as reproduction. It is critical of texts that repress this pleasure. Alice Jardine discusses the American male writer who "obsessively fears disintegration into the incestuous nondifference of the maternal space." Jardine (1985), p. 233. Naomi Schor asks, "What function, if any, is served by the repression of female libido within the economy of the realist text", and discovers this repression to be one of realism's "ennabling conditions". *Breaking the Chain: Women, Theory and French Realist Fiction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. xi. In *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*, Angela Carter comments on how Eugenie rapes her mother with a dildo and instead of having her reach orgasm, which would confound Sade's petty libertinism and Freudian analysis of mother/daughter hatred, the writer arranges for Madame de Mistival to faint: "Mother must never be allowed to come, and so to come alive." (London: Virago, 1979), p. 128. Kristeva has also given space to the mother's pleasure, and in ACW notes the daughter's socially sanctioned investment in keeping it hidden: "That *jouissance* be forbidden to the mother: this is the demand of the father's daughter . . ." (p. 32).

²⁷ See *The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982).

²⁸ Gallop (1982), p. 119.

attempt to *empty out* or *cordon off* female sexual identity. These rhetorical procedures are always incomplete, leaving islands of self-implicating discourse, nevertheless "woman" and the "mother" in Kristeva become ambivalent figures that function as both locus and metaphor for all that phallogentric language excludes. This volatile maternal site also hardens into the strange and threatening phantasm of the phallic mother.

4. 3. The maternal phallus: real or phantasmatic?

"We are now obliged to recognise that the little girl is a little man", commented Freud as he hypothesised on the nature of the phallic phase of sexuality in girls.²⁹ Normal femininity demanded the rejection of this phase which located pleasure in the clitoris, and it also required that the girl turn away from her mother: "Her love had as its object the phallic mother; with the discovery that the mother is castrated it becomes possible to drop her as a love-object . . .".³⁰ The phallic mother for Freud was an impossibility, yet we are also led to speculate that she appeared to him as a powerful phantom, stalking the border that separates possible from impossible, haunting "the house of Oedipus . . . the object of his fascinated and horrified gaze".³¹ The spectre of a woman with a penis has proved to be a dominant image in some circles of theoretical discourse. Hélène Cixous accuses women who refuse the feminine in favour of writing in the "masculine" of cutting themselves out a "paper penis"; but by the same token she is quick to mock the phallic commotion as disguising a dependence on an all-powerful mother figure - "the old lady is always right behind them" - who underwrites language and culture.³² Whether rejected as phallogentrism or endorsed as its necessarily excluded term, the figure of the phallic mother can give rise to disgusted laughter, horror, or fear: that is, abjection.

²⁹ "The Psychology of Women" in *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, trans. W. J. H. Sprott, E. Jones ed. (London: Hogarth Press, 1949), p. 151.

³⁰ Freud (1949), pp. 162-3.

³¹ Madelon Sprengnether (1990), p. 5.

³² "The Laugh of the Medusa" in Marks and de Courtivron eds. (1981), pp. 253, 256.

A figure of impossibility whose interiority removes itself to the exterior, she is the stuff of horror films, fantasy, and nightmares; something implacable lying in wait in a pool of darkness. She is the endlessly fecund and voracious Mother in *Alien*, *The Exorcist* and *Carrie*, giver and taker of life, source of corruption, decay, double-dealing. Do we read in the sameness of these images the makings of a cautionary tale designed to keep women and language in line? A fantasy propped up by psychoanalysts? Or the inevitable effects of excluding the feminine from representation? We must begin by providing an archaeology for this term as we find it at work in Kristeva's own texts.

We have already encountered the phallic mother in *Revolution in Poetic Language*, where the pre-Oedipal relation is assigned to a replete space in which the mother is imagined to have absolute power: "As the addressee of every demand, the mother occupies the place of alterity. Her replete body, the receptacle and guarantor of demands, takes the place of all narcissistic, hence imaginary, affects and gratifications; she is, in other words, the phallus." (RPL: 47)

Lacan chooses the phallus as the symbolic's "transcendental signifier", in relation to which the subject gains his discursive, and gendered identity. As Gallop notes, neither male nor female actually have the phallus since "symbolising unmediated, full *jouissance* [it] must be lacking for any subject to enter language, effective intersubjectivity."³³ To turn a blind eye to castration would be to imagine that originary *jouissance* with the mother was still possible, and it is this assumption that produces the phantasm of the phallic mother. Psychosis is a disorder where there is a literal disavowal or turning away from castration; but even when psychosis is not clinically present, for Lacanians there is the implication that figurally, the subject's eye is always turned towards that place where the mother existed. Desire and the signifier, as Lacan has shown, arise from the place

³³ Gallop (1982), pp. 95-6.

of the Other. In discourse, it is the second person "you" to whom the subject addresses its demands and desires that temporarily plays the part of the Other once assumed by the mother.³⁴ Jane Gallop, in explaining the relation of the other to the mother speaks of her persistent hold on desire in language in the following terms: "the silent interlocutor, the second person who never assumes the first person pronoun, is the subject presumed to know, the object of transference, the phallic Mother, in command of the mysterious processes of life, death, meaning and identity."³⁵ The originary phallus of the mother, hidden below the "bar" in the unconscious, effectively underwrites language, which as Lacan insists can operate only when veiled.

Lacan is emphatic that the importance of the phallus is that of its function, of what it symbolises, which is most importantly, an *absent category*. To refer to a phallic mother, then, as if it had a real existence, is to fall into essentialism. It is a condition of *loss* that moves the subject from nature to culture. Man's needs, he concluded, always "return to him alienated."³⁶ Yet just as the phallus is still connected to the penis,³⁷ so too the castration complex cannot be thought without some reference to the identity of woman. If Lacan endeavours to maintain a stagey vagueness on the connection, Gallop's critical writing shows how this elision is impossible to avoid when she happily argues that language is a "veiled attribute of the mother".³⁸ Thus the so-called lost object is never far away from phenomenology. Indeed, many explanations of intimate space presupposing

³⁴ In treating an other as the-subject-presumed-to-know we are desiring the phallus. See Freud's observation of analysis that the relationship is prolonged because the female analysand wants a penis from her analyst, in "Analysis Terminable and Interminable", SE XXIII, pp. 216-253. A Lacanian reading is provided by Stuart Schneiderman, when he notes that the end of an analysis is to recognise the shortfall in relation to meaning, power, and desire (= "castration"), to assume in other words, the desire of the Other through taking on the inevitable gap between signifier and signified. See his *Jacques Lacan: the Death of an Intellectual Hero* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), pp. 84, 103.

³⁵ Gallop (1982), p. 115.

³⁶ "The Signification of the Phallus", Lacan (1977), p. 286.

³⁷ Here is Lacan on the function of the phallus as privileged signifier: "It can be said that this signifier is chosen because it is the most tangible element in the real of sexual copulation . . . It might also be said that, by virtue of its turgidity, it is the image of the vital flow as it is transmitted in generation." In "The Signification of the Phallus", Lacan (1977), p. 287.

³⁸ Gallop (1982), p. 117.

Lacanian theory appear to endorse a similar narrative that in reading the feminine strangely, cannot avoid implicating the (female) body.

Which is why one of the risks of using familial terms to read language is that we are inevitably drawn into a discourse that meshes sociology and psychoanalysis. However, I do not believe as John Lechte seems to that we can clearly differentiate between positionality within psychic structures and the rather more humdrum relation of a child to its parents. He writes: "when Kristeva speaks about a person's . . . relation to a mother who is entirely accessible and evident in a speech without limits, or of a father who is only too visible in the precision and order of every paragraph, it is in the psychoanalytic sense of the dynamic interaction between the semiotic and the symbolic that this should be understood."³⁹ Kristeva too appears to endorse such a reading when in "Giotto's Joy" she notes that the semiotic or feminine lessens "both object identification and phenomenal fixation." (*Desire*: 225) But the break is never clean: even if language is now regarded as being lined with an impersonal (but feminine) semiotic materiality, the subject-in-process teeters on the rim of phenomenology. Neither at home within its language, nor fully outside its walls either, the female voyager's position is therefore one of contradiction. In "Women's Time" for instance there is the suggestion that Freudian hypotheses should be questioned beginning less from a conceptual knowledge which would leave the site of the mother perpetually vacant, than from the perspective offered by our own experience, by charting, in other words, "the very personal affect experienced when facing it as a subject and as a woman." ("WT": 200) This is a crucial admission easily overlooked, but clearly the two terms "subject" (as positionality) and "woman" (as positioned) mutually impinge on the production of affect. Which means that Kristeva must present the hollowed out aspects of subjectivity alongside a more personal discourse. The elaborate reading strategies developed in "Polylogue" to sever materiality from a female consciousness, moreover, are only partially

³⁹ Lechte (1990), p. 131.

successful (the object returns to inhabit the "rim"), and I remain unconvinced that psychic space is not intimately nurtured by social space and naturally, vice versa.

So the scene of representation remains indebted to an anxiety that somehow the mother still remains phallic, and this imaginary topos has been given vivid and abject life by a whole literary tradition. One contemporary writer preoccupied with powerful women (and feminised men) is Angela Carter. In *The Passion of New Eve*, American society is collapsing and a group of women led by Mother have banded together to contest the anarchy and eventually take control.⁴⁰ Mother has a beard and is six and a half feet tall with a great row of nipples across her chest. The women capture a wandering Don Juan named Evelyn and castrate him. He is renamed "Eve", and when he has recovered sufficiently from his sex-change, Mother plans to impregnate him with his own sperm so phallocentrism will be no more. Mother's operating theatre is a murky abbatoir, and Evelyn lies under local anaesthetic while she lops off his genitals with one blow and throws them to her daughter Sophia who casually slips them into her pocket. The sacred aura of masculinity has been stripped away in this disrespectful scene, but Mother remains archetypically phallic - the visible expression of what lifting the "veil" might reveal.

In returning to the domestic origins of the scene of representation, Kristeva is driven to even more extravagant manoeuvres, and the final effect is to exile maternity and womanhood to a grim and murky space among the foundations of the family mansion. Accordingly the pre-Oedipal mother is read as the necessary support for subjectivity, the negative space against whom we measure our own differentiation, but she herself remains estranged from the reflective world of light and forms. Given the problematic status of any form of representation that accepts the psychoanalytical paradigm of a feminine omnipotence, how is the

⁴⁰ Angela Carter (London: Virago, 1982).

phallic mother elaborated in Kristeva's own work? How does she account for the curious necessity for woman's absence from signification in order that it may come into existence?

Similar in some respects to the earlier strategies adopted in *Revolution in Poetic Language*, unveiling the phallic mother in "The Novel as Polylogue" is seen as analogous to unveiling language, revealing the myth of transcendence that it inhabits, and celebrating the passion of the "letter" through the advent of the semiotic. Kristeva's reading goes beyond those offered in *Revolution in Poetic Language* though, when in seeking to challenge the transcendence and identity that she believes the mother supports, she vividly embroiders on Freud's myth of social origins. As I discussed in Chapter Three, Freud attributed the origin of the incest taboo to the sons' murder of the Father of the Primitive Horde, whose rulings against incest were subsequently internalised through the first Communal Meal. In her essay on Sollers, Kristeva stages a bizarre reversal of Freud's myth and asserts that the mother must be "eaten" in order for language to destroy the boundaries of sense and sensibility within the self, and to give rise to a heterogeneity of voices speaking at once: a polylogue.

The writer is the exemplary figure in this re-staged Oedipal drama who will break the rules (who will "know" his mother through introducing *jouissance* into his discourse) and will emerge from his encounter all the more able to symbolise his incestuous pleasure. *Revolution in Poetic Language* had taken the metaphor of incest for a particular musicating form of language that would enact its transgressions and renewal of linguistic codes on the body of the text itself. Clearly there had been a link established in the early work between maternal *jouissance* and feminine sexuality: "The woman's *jouissance* is that of the mother," we read in *Revolution in Poetic Language*. (RLP: 499)⁴¹ Even so, its full material force remained largely unexplored, and the representation "female" was

⁴¹ Domna Stanton also makes this point in "Difference on Trial: a Critique of the Maternal Metaphor in Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva" in Nancy Miller ed. (1986), p. 160.

restrained within the category of maternity as a necessary myth of origins. In much of the writing that follows however, where Kristeva's personal voice is heard more clearly such as in "Polylogue", the phantasmatic creation of maternal jouissance is often accompanied by a potentially destructive female force whose fearful energies must be restrained by an increasingly complex theoretical narrative.

Despite these obvious difficulties with maternal identity, Kristeva insists on the fundamentally non-essential nature of what presents itself to the reader as an orgasmic, perhaps even psychotic call to hallucinate incest and murder. For the moment, let us agree with her. We can provisionally accept that incest may be used to illustrate the metaphorical relationship that pertains between the artist and his work, or more properly to signify the subject's place in language: "What we take for a mother, and all the sexuality that the maternal image commands, is nothing but the place where rhythm stops and identity is constituted . . . The son's incest is a meeting with the other, the first other, the mother." (*Desire*: 191) Jouissance inscribes itself in the text through the effects of the chora and semiotic rhythm on language. The "'mother herself' does not exist". (*Desire*: 194) In this country, everything is permitted - everything for the son, that is, for while theoretically jouissance leaves no identity intact, "Polylogue" is actually an homage to male desire. Removing the appeal to an exterior grounded in metaphysics has not only restored a strange essential identity to "Mother", but it has equally failed to erase a privileged male voice.

Representing the sons, the "female" voyager's intention is to continue to challenge the imperviousness of the symbolic with the figure of a mother "eaten", but also vanquished; something to pass beyond. The maternal language that arises at the mirror-stage and recalls the "jubilant rhythms" of an even earlier time, is encountered and re-housed through the "stroke" of language and logic, which sees to it that the mother is "pierced, stripped, signified, uncovered,

castrated, and carried away into the symbolic." (*Desire*: 195) (I cannot help but be reminded here of the rape of the Sabine women and other venerable representations of women as spoils of war.) Desire, rather than passing from one object (signifier) to another as Lacan would have it, in Kristeva is met and nourished in the literary text, in a manner evoking the first communal meal that Freud speaks of, except that this time the victim is not male, but female.

Beyond the tortuous and self-indulgent reading practice elaborated here, incest as metaphor obviously occupies a place in excess of the purely figural. From one perspective, the horror of incest is that it exteriorises the lining of intimate space, bringing into full view the polymorphous body which does not yet recognise a proper distinction between inside and outside. "Polylogue" literally enacts this confusion between inside and outside, phenomenon and figure, when it suggests that poetry as incest is actually commensurate with incest's revived memory from the poet's *own* (and not textual) unconscious. Writers therefore are those who re-experience directly on the body at a particular stage in their psychosexual development the archaic jouissance of the mother which returns from where its memory has been repressed in the unconscious.

The inference is clear: artists (particularly of writerly, polylogical texts) are sons who recall, metaphorically and experientially, an original jouissance with their mothers that occurred before they became subjects in language. Objections to this formulation must appear equally clear: firstly, it rules out females from producing the kind of writing that Kristevan analysis privileges (and this conclusion is borne out in the comments on women and art examined earlier); and secondly, the artist has been cast in a peculiarly ambivalent relationship to the mother. In fact, Kristeva's text on the polylogical novel has gone to almost ludicrous lengths to concoct a series of manoeuvres that will first aggrandise maternal identity in paranoid fashion and then permanently bar it from entering the scene of representation: the son-artist is invited to ravish his mother and devour her in a

cannibalistic meal, overlooked by an approving (and Oedipalised) daughter-critic. "Eat or be eaten", she seems to say.⁴² Surely the psychic narratives of sexuality and language can find other less pathological origins which do not confine the figure of maternity (and eventually femininity) to an insatiable cavernous mouth.

Kristeva had insisted that blind Oedipal subjects were inevitably preoccupied with avoiding negativity by producing banal ego-centred narratives. Unanalysed, representation of the personal became one more mystifying effect of paternal law. Its corollary lay in assigning the semiotic as the privileged representative of femininity a room of its own. Kristeva claims that she supports neither a valorisation of female essence nor in making a comfortable home for women in the semiotic. This is because, she argues, the unchecked presence of the semiotic tacitly supports the paternal function of language. But if the dangerous negativity of the drives can be fed through language, then there will be no chance for the "Mother as Master" syndrome to develop, or for some kind of essential identity to fill negativity with the form of an object or phantasm. As Mallarmé reminds us, "ce pays n'existe pas". Accordingly, to allow the mother to speak *in and for herself*⁴³ is to risk psychosis or fascism. A female subject, we infer, would merely underwrite metaphysics and its repression of the body, or would invite the body's violent return.

Ironically though, her own form of analysis leads to representing power at-

⁴² In a similar vein, Angela Carter reads Eugenie's rape of her mother in Sade's *Philosophy in the Boudoir* as the ultimate attempt "to achieve sexual autonomy, according to the rules of the academy; to attack Father or his substitutes in order to achieve existential autonomy is against the rules. Eugenie's sexual egoism must be sanctioned by the group in which she participates; it must be observed. It must be contained by their observation or else it might threaten the rules of the school itself." Carter (1979), p. 133.

⁴³ On the mother's silence, Marianne Hirsch comments: "The mother herself is and remains abset even to herself. The place she inhabits is vacant. Although she produces and upholds the subject, she herself remains the matrix, the other, the origin. . . If the story of individual development, as Freud tells it, rests on a process of separation from the mother, then the mother's own part in that process remains absent, erased from theoretical and narrative representation." Hirsch (1989), pp. 168-9.

tributed to the mother through metaphors of violence and aggressive incorporation. Now I do not think that one can simply dismiss Kristeva as someone who at this point fails to give a sufficiently correct feminist reading. To mete out this sort of judgement in the context of writing so rich and complicated would be to radically underread. One of the reasons I appreciate Kristeva is that alongside of exploring the feminine question, her enunciation does not permit idealisation on the part of the (female) reader. When we come to her texts looking for the subject presumed to know, looking for someone to love, we find a discourse that refuses such narcissistic identification: "I am not the one you love", it says. The subject "Kristeva" remains a familiar character on the Oedipal stage at our peril. Yet it would be another kind of blindness not to concede that the term "woman" in her discourse from 1974 onwards introduces a personally inflected enunciation spoken by a female voyager whose effects, readable as well as equivocal, produce a maternal figure at once horrifying and valorised.

In the haste to judge women's narratives as maintaining too close a relationship to the body, she has in the same breath created a lonely position for her own speech as a woman. By insinuating that such narratives are the primary supporters of a repressive, symbolic mode of representation (even if the symbolic as such does not recognise women's claims to speak publicly about a personal history!) she is reaffirming the solitary position of the female intellectual who visited China in 1974, "unrecognized by the women and detached from the men." And by accompanying the turn to autobiography with the figure of a hostile mother against whom we all must strive, I suspect that she has descended into an interior purgatorial world of grotesque forms from which there may be no relief.

4. 4. "Stabat Mater": the "workings of enigmatic sublimation"

It is probably too simplistic to attribute the introduction of a loving mother figure solely to Kristeva's own experience of motherhood, although "Stabat Mater"

shows we cannot discount that involvement either. I find a crucial difference in tone in this essay: less stern and uncompromising than those pieces collected in *Desire in Language*, it marks a noticeable softening of an earlier intellectual austerity. Here there is a more consistent emphasis on locating a subversive feminine voice that will interrogate language and philosophy. Several years later, the essay "Women's Time" suggests why such a voice is required: "women . . . seem to feel that they are the casualties, that they have been left out of the socio-symbolic contract, of language as the fundamental social bond. They find no affect there, no more that they find the fluid and infinitesimal significations of their relationships with the nature of their own bodies, that of the child, . . .". ("WT": 199)

The significance of pregnancy and its representation in language, and the place of the female intellectual all find fertile ground in "Stabat Mater", and their interplay suggests that the figure of the mother may yet provide support for a *woman's* speech. Written in 1976 following the birth of her son, the text is a complex and exciting meditation that reads language and childbirth as originating from the site of a primary wound. In appearing to conflate the experience of pregnancy and the experience of reading, Kristeva opens up our very first primal shelter to the scrutiny of critical practice and disfigures its homely connotations through the addition of an unreadable surplus. By no means though is motherhood represented as being all tears: here too are its pleasures, mixed with the pleasures of the text and celebrating in their interplay a succession of epiphanies in language: "As if a geometry ghost could suffer when collapsing in a noiseless tumult". (*Tales*: 242) The experience of motherhood threatens conventional discourse with collapse. Its agents are "grinders of volumes, expanses, spaces, lines, points"; a geometry of the maternal that confronts the discourse of idealism with a subversive feminine resonance. In an attempt to encourage two different discourses to engage in mutual interaction the typography of the page is divided in two: a bold typescript denotes a biographical,

lyrical intrusion alongside a formal analytical commentary. Signifying the topographical and material differences between symbolic and semiotic, the text's divisions literalise the animosities in idealism between matter and form, flesh and spirit, phenomenon and inscription, while simultaneously attempting to deny this division through performing what could be termed an "enigmatic sublimation". Where the hysteric denies the separation of body *from* words, "Stabat Mater" similarly denies the purity of the signifier, but it does so through displacing the effects of the body *into* words. Can such an eccentric discourse on motherhood then, creatively subvert the transcendence that supports idealism by providing an alternative to the distinction between inside and outside, and between home and place? Can its linking of personal narrative and love provide a way out of the phallic mother syndrome, and finally, can there be a personally inflected subject of enunciation (that is, a *knowing* subject of desire) who is marked female? These are the questions that "Stabat Mater" addresses to the reader.

In some respects like writing, motherhood can have a cathartic function. The popular understanding of motherhood is that it is primarily a comforting nurturing role, and its pleasures have been closely connected to ideals of love and self-sacrifice. Motherhood attempts to compassionately absorb the grief and disillusionment of a society founded on loss. As lacking subjects we can discover in the figure of the mother a comforting presence rather than a shape to fear. Perhaps a focus on sacrificial motherhood is the necessary escape from abjection, from the mutual absorption of love between two people, and from the social unrest that today leaves subjects homeless exiles, at odds with their own bodies and desires. But it is almost impossible to separate a discourse on the mother from our own experiences of mothering and/or being mothered.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Writing on motherhood, Irigaray for instance, chooses to represent its discourse through an imaginary conversation between mother and daughter. See "And the One Doesn't Stir Without the Other", trans. Hélène Vivienne Wenzel, *Signs*, Vol. 7, No. 1, (1981), pp. 60-7. Nancy Chodorow defines the mother in terms of *object relations* and describes how mothers perceive daughters as extensions of themselves. See Chodorow (1978). In *The Mother/Daughter Plot* (1989), Marianne Hirsch illustrates her text's front cover with a photograph of her *own* maternal grandmother.

When we speak of motherhood, we end up affirming primary narcissism: "this motherhood is the *fantasy* that is nurtured by the adult, man or woman, of a lost territory; what is more, it involves less an idealized archaic mother than the idealization of the *relationship* that binds us to her, one that cannot be localized - an idealization of primary narcissism." (*Tales*: 234) What exactly comes to mind when we think of "mother"? Our own experiences of being mothered? The ideals of being a good (and bad) mother that we have internalised? The discourses of religion and psychoanalysis and their varying degrees of idealization of motherhood? Why is it so difficult in fact, to see the mother as a subject in her own right? Why is motherhood surrounded by a fantasy produced by the richest resources that the imaginary has to offer - the fantasy of a "lost territory"; and why should we find it easier to speak of our relation to her? And why is it that when I want to speak of "mother" I end up by speaking of myself? Kristeva has correctly located a gap in discourse about "the mother". This gap is experienced by all subjects, but for *women* to talk about the mother becomes even more difficult because of the trouble they have in separating from their own mothers, in being different from them, and then in separating from their daughters.⁴⁵

Another way to express this is to state that there is a confusion of the relation between subject and object. We blur the boundaries between subject and object because when we attempt to speak of the existence of an other, we are led to speak of our own subjectivities. And with women, such a transference of personal affect to the site of what we desire to know, is, according to Kristeva, more exaggerated. In that case, is Kristeva indicating that her own discourse may be no more than a repetition of this site of transference; that she too will speak of *her* own

⁴⁵ In "WT", Kristeva recognises the greater difficulty women have in differentiating and becoming autonomous when she draws attention to "the connivance of the young girl with her mother, her greater difficulty than the boy in detaching herself from the mother in order to accede to the order of signs as invested by the absence and separation constitutive of the paternal function." *Moi* ed. (1986), p. 204.

mother when attempting to speak of *the* mother;⁴⁶ that she too will be drawn to elaborate a discourse of her own emerging subjectivity? The risks of writing entail constructing a narrative of the mother that will not solely reproduce our eternal struggle with her or sentimentalise our memories of her love, but will present the maternal relation as something that is ultimately separate from our infantile fantasies and desires. Kristeva's performative strategies act out this challenge to critical practice in their recognition of the risks of recalling a nourishing maternal fusion that is inseparable from a primal hatred directed at the "maternal container". But Kristeva's analysis equally produces the knowledge that these risks can never be entirely eliminated from speech, and that in order to bear their abjection for us, we need to invest in a new discourse of love, a "*herethics*", that might reconcile us with the body and so take the sting from death.

"The paradox: mother, or primary narcissism". Me, or you? Implicated in the rhetorical structures of the text I encounter a further dilemma: the problematics of reading. For when I read Kristeva, I look for a reassuring shelter, a "mother". This part of reading meets the needs of my *ideal ego*,⁴⁷ my need for narcissistic gratification through incorporation. A second aspect of the reading relationship insists on the ability to be able to idealise this "mother", to admire her life or speech, and to wish in some way to emulate it through introjection. This satisfies my *ego ideal*, the part of me that needs someone outside of myself to idealise and love. Reading "Stabat Mater" endorses these expectations: it nourishes and exhorts, but its conceptual strangeness forbids any permanent identification. The discourse of maternity as I read it according to Kristeva swallows the necessity for a paranoid reader ("alone of all her sex") and sustains us instead through a vibrant play with the textures of language.

⁴⁶ According to Elizabeth Grosz, woman is "positioned in relation to the signifier, the phallus, which places her in the position of *being* rather than *having* (the phallus, the object of the other's desire)". Grosz (1990), p. 71.

⁴⁷ See later in this chapter for a more concise definition of the terms *ideal ego* and *ego ideal*.

What could possibly be the strategic virtue in choosing the Virgin to speak of motherhood to a contemporary audience? Kristeva argues that Mary exemplifies primary narcissism, but in a unique way. Men and women can identify with the Virgin, Kristeva believes, because her freedom from sexuality and death puts her on a par with God and thus gives them leave to love her in a whole host of ways that can range from sublimation to masochism. As Lechte comments, Mary is also the perfect mother because she gave up her son,⁴⁸ and her experience of loss is able to sustain us in the variety of losses that might be ours. While I agree that Mary may well symbolically be Other for us, she is not without humanity. Mary's hysterical "I know but all the same" signifies her fleshly implication in maternity; her suffering at the foot of the cross, the "brilliant illustration of the wrenching between desire for the masculine corpse and negation of death". (*Tales*: 251) Mary, like her Son and like us, is a crucified being, a "continuous separation, a division of the very flesh." She symbolises, consequently, "a division of language . . .". (*Desire*: 254) Yet when our sense of identity and our grasp on language is overwhelmed, if we have any feeling for Catholic iconography at all, Mary's privileged position allows her to stand as a representative of the first primal mother: "Archaic maternal love would be an incorporation of my suffering that is unfailing, unlike what often happens with the lacunary network of signs." (*Desire*: 252) Unlike the gaps and lacks that language opens within us, maternal love absorbs our sorrow. In that case what keeps her from becoming phallic, or alternatively, "the underhand double of explicit phallic power"? (*Desire*: 245) We need to acknowledge here that Mary's privilege does not exempt her from loss as she too inhabits language as a divided being, a borderline existence that is in fact, a permanent mode of identity for all subjects.

Kristeva additionally suggests that the papal doctrines that eventually elevated the Virgin to the powerful role of Queen of Heaven and Mother of the Church

⁴⁸ Lechte (1990), p. 178.

are undermined but not obliterated by placing her on her knees before her Son, her body now a site of renunciation and compassion. This teetering between earth and heaven, not forgetting what Kristeva considers to be the pride implicit in being the mother of God, meets Mary's own needs for primary narcissism in that it provides the necessary compensation for her *fleshly* identity. Thus any discourse on motherhood that refuses this identity and insists purely on the Virgin's spirituality and perfection will come to grief and will, moreover, reinforce the dualisms of idealist philosophy that Kristeva is attempting to subvert.

To analyse childbirth is a challenge because its representation involves a surplus that resists comprehension. How could a discourse of motherhood be written? Can it be spoken about, brought into consciousness and analysed; or can it only be enacted through performance? Are two columns of type representing "flesh" and "words" respectively sufficient to ensure a relationship between representation and the mother? Is the "sublime" that motherhood *is* best represented by giving it sublimation in language? By absorbing its alienating, mysterious carnality in words? Analysis reveals the fact that the real⁴⁹ of motherhood is a multiplicity of folds that a typography of two columns rather than illuminating, actually misrepresents. An objective history of the Virgin on one hand and experience on the other are not enough, since they merely point to the "lacunary network of signs". Kristeva thus seems to be offering herself as someone who will clear away conventional discourse (on motherhood) by dismantling "the fiction of the mother" but who also narcissistically positions herself in the mother's "place". Identification, through a mimetic displacement in language, involves both narcissism and its critique, which in turn assumes a complex relationship between the semiotic and the symbolic. Kristeva here seems to be implying that when the experience of motherhood is analysed as knowingly as she herself has

⁴⁹ The term the "real"/"Real" is derived from Lacan who writes in *Ecrits* that "the Real is full and lacks nothing" (in Grosz, 1990). According to Grosz, the real is "a pure, unspeakable, pre-representational plenitude." (p. 71) See also Chapter Three for a discussion of this term.

done by transposing its estranging effects into language, the result can only be "an identification with love itself". (*Tales*: 253) Such a mysterious sublime form of identification challenges all localised identities and may be the only way to effectively displace idealism. Certainly her earlier work's rejection of conventional iconography had made this kind of reconciling identification impossible.

However, "Stabat Mater" also gives the impression that there is more to an analysis of motherhood than its enigmatic representation in language. There is the implicit suggestion in the text that an analysis of the critic's own experience is the most lucid way to proceed. In an act of renunciation and passion, a narcissism not unlike Mary's in fact, Kristeva herself stands in the strange place where the woman as mother dwells, implicated in its "underground swarming of seconds . . . folding in unimaginable spaces", (*Tales*: 235) yet mediating its strangeness to us through the "surge of anguish" that writing is. Elsewhere this literal psychotic identification with the object of thought is acknowledged as reflecting the necessity of being "a woman [who will] attempt to take up that exorbitant wager of carrying the rational project to the outer borders of the signifying venture of men . . .". (*Desire*: x) Kristeva's own body has now become the privileged site of sacrifice. Giving birth to a text *and* giving birth to a son defies the philosopher (Hegel) who once remarked that women could be universal or particular, but never the singular subjects of consciousness. It never occurred to Hegel that women who were *mothers* could also become intellectuals. But the woman who writes adds new meaning to the figure of the mother who loves in her impossible fusion of flesh and words. This is because writing about motherhood enforces a separation from the body whereby the writer must confront *through language* the alterity of pregnancy. When that writer is a mother as well, the degree of displacement effected is more subtle still, as at the same time she returns us over and over again through the potentially self-implicating layers in discourse to our earliest fleshly memories of primary narcissism.

Separation from the mother and thus from the bodies we inhabit is only ever partial and never complete, as language and its materiality - "weavings of abstractions to be torn" - remind us. I think we can understand Kristeva's identification with the mother as being a celebration in its own right, but more importantly, as a strategic riposte to the kind of theorising that would sweep feminine experience, along with the material lining of thought ("negativity") into a void. She is consistently taken up with forcing this conceptual blindspot of idealist discourse to declare itself and in the figure of the Virgin as represented to us by the analyst-as-mother, she has found the perfect relation for ravishing speech.

At this point we are returned to the original intention set out in *Revolution in Poetic Language* which was to estrange thought and language, but now in "Stabat Mater" the project passes through the mystery of the "Incarnation" that language *is*. On this side of the incarnation lies home and all that is familiar, where predictable egos inhabit predictable bodies. On the far side of Mary is the *unheimlich* to which Mallarmé attributed "the primitive lightening bolts of logic". We inhabit our bodies and minds so thoroughly that there is no space for innovation that will take us by surprise and jolt our habitual procedures and organisation of thought. "Stabat Mater" offers, in the words of Hegel, "a sunburst which, in one flash, illuminates the features of the new world."⁵⁰ Its epiphanies point the way not to a revelation of transcendent being however, but to a moment of striking perception on the *far* side of consciousness: "FLASH - instant of time or of dream without time; inordinately swollen atoms of a bond, a vision, a shiver, a yet formless, unnameable embryo." (*Tales*: 234) In this coming face to face with an unrecognisable "identity" our sense of continuity breaks apart, and we are unsettled, beside ourselves, because the Other has returned to confront us with a sense of our finitude.

⁵⁰ Hegel (1977), p. 7. This is so even if Hegel's intention in this figure was to privilege the activities of thought. He uses the metaphor of the sun as an affirmation of man as thinking being at home in the State, and thus a reflection of and reconciliation with the Divine. See Kristeva, *RPL*, p. 135. However, the sunburst is also a moment of estrangement that takes consciousness by surprise.

When alterity is mediated through a discourse that so self-consciously mimes (reproduces) motherhood in relation to an imaginary transcendence, the Other appears at its most intense, yet restrained from its radical destructiveness. There may be no more effective place from which to estrange language than through an unthinkable dialogue effected between Virgin, sexually active mother and female intellectual. Beginning with Hegel, Kristeva informs us, Mary has been thought of as universal and particular but never singular. (*Tales*: 261) Kristeva is fascinated by Hegel because he too sought to grasp at what lay beyond recognition; but his reasoning eventually led to the other being naturalised and subdued by the consciousness. This is why she reads "because of and in spite of Hegel", attempting to construct a space for women and language that being neither inside nor outside, neither subject of a specular masterful gaze or its mute object, will resist naturalisation. If this attempt succeeds, it will establish subjectivity not as phallic or paranoid, but embodied and differentiated, and thus acknowledging the symbolic without being enclosed by it.

"A woman will only have the chance to live her life either *hyperabstractly* ('immediately universal,' Hegel said) in order thus to earn divine grace and homologation within the symbolic order; or merely *different*, other, fallen ('immediately particular,' Hegel said). But she will not be able to accede to the complexity of being divided, of heterogeneity, of the catastrophic-fold-of-'being' ('never singular,' Hegel said)." (*Tales*: 248-9) In these terms, Mary can be seen as universal because her conception was immaculate, and singular because she was, all the same, a mother who grieved at the loss of her son. Generally speaking though, because women usually invest all of themselves in the family, according to Hegel, their existence is particular. Particularity means that its form (reproduction for instance) can't be negated, hence transcended; that is, made into history, or transformed into culture. Because women by and large refuse to risk their lives in struggles for power and since they lack the necessary means to be

actively engaged in a reflective life, they are cut off from the recognition of their own finitude, which for Hegel circled back to produce the subject of consciousness. The fundamental energy of the self-conscious life concerns loss, differentiation and doubling, and this is what women's preoccupation with ensuing the continuity of family life is unable to accept. Death's significance for women only lies in the particularity of its loss (that is, loved ones die) but never in its significance as a graspable, reproducible concept, nor as the precondition for the recreation of the world through reason. Hegel therefore deprived human reproduction of a consciousness and women of an active, enunciative role in discourse.⁵¹

While Kristeva attempts to show against Hegel that in pregnancy the mother actually experiences the heterogeneity of folded being that he claimed only for men, she still considers that the maternal body is a being *in extremis*; it does not properly belong to the order of signs and so lies outside of women's active knowledge. But only a truncated reading would then conclude that this must leave women permanently exiled from the world of thought and creative life. If we were to add some of her earlier critical readings of idealism to the text of "Stabat Mater", we can see that subjectivity for women, however different from men's and however difficult to achieve, is not only a reality, but may exist as a permanent challenge to the notion of autonomous identity. A challenge, moreover, which receives its most intense expression in the figure of the female intellectual.

Hegel had assumed a certain "unity" of the self when self-consciousness and the assimilated object were united. "Desire is the agent of this unity;" Kristeva remarks, "it acts as the agent of unification by negativizing the object." (*RPL*: 134) This is the paranoid moment, when the ego splits, projecting the "bad object" out

⁵¹ Mary O'Brien criticises Hegel in that she believes woman to be in actuality not abstract or particular, but in her reproductive labour, a "living *continuity*". The claims of paternity O'Brien argues, are negated in reproduction with the alientation of the male seed at the time of intercourse. Particularly since the intervention of birth control into reproduction and the question of choice, women are clearly involved in ethics (and theoretical discourse). See *Reproducing the World: Essays in Feminist Theory* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989), p. 188.

to the exterior and erasing difference ("an independent life") within. However the subject still finds this unity threatening because it is potentially heterogeneous, "a non-synthetic reunion". (RPL: 539) To ward off the threat of disintegration and to come to terms with internal difference, desire subordinates difference to a self-consciousness ultimately submissive to the One, the Spirit: "The 'I' is divided and doubled only to become reunified within the unity of Self-Consciousness. This is the ambiguousness of the idealist dialectic; it posits division, movement, and process, but in the same move dismisses them in the name of a higher metaphysical and repressive truth, one that is differentiated but solely within the confines of its unity: Self-Consciousness and its juridical corollary, the State." (RPL: 135)

And what of the object outside consciousness? Kristeva reads "Force" ["Kraft"] in Hegel as negativity in its most alien, material form, which she associates with the semiotic. Hegel reclaims force for the symbolic under the category of the Notion ("force "driven back into itself", RPL: 114), but not before the disturbing recognition that it is actually heterogeneous and other to thought and knowledge. "In conceiving radical negativity as an *expression*, the idealist dialectic deprives itself of negativity's powerful moment: the scission that exceeds and precedes the advent of thetic understanding." (RPL: 115) Interestingly, the privileged metaphor that Kristeva uses to illustrate her re-reading of "Kraft" is that of *childbirth*. Here she quotes Artaud: "In it we feel a grinding of sluices, a kind of horrible volcanic shock from which the light of day has been *dissociated*. And from this clash, from the tearing of two principles, all potential images are born in a thrust stronger than a ground swell."⁵² Idealism amputates Force by erasing its painful conception and birth; similarly the "reality" of motherhood is amputated by procedures which continually ignore its powerful moment of negativity. Like the notion, the place of motherhood before being naturalised by thought is "that of a non-being which contains the system, which conditions the becoming-system

⁵² See Antonin Artaud's "L'Automate personnel, *Œuvres complètes*, Vol. 1, p. 179, cited in RPL, p. 539.

of the process, at the same time that it threatens the subject . . .". (RLP: 539)

Such an implicit linking of maternity with Kristeva's re-reading of the notion allows Elizabeth Grosz to criticise the fact that women here have "no special link to the maternal body . . .".⁵³ Grosz's reading certainly highlights the weaknesses of a non-essential reading of maternity, and Kristeva's reluctance to credit the activities of nurturing and socialisation with an agent. Yet if we read Kristeva's surreptitious readings of Hegel "correctly"? differently? we can see that when representation presents an aggressive, incorporating face to alterity, neither sex emerges unscathed. If consciousness amputates motherhood's strangeness, the mother in turn "gnaws" at the symbolic's "almightiness". But we can also see the limited nature of a reading that repeatedly reiterates the fact that Kristeva is not a good enough feminist (by extension, not a good enough woman, and clearly "not I"! Do we, like Simone de Beauvoir, "too hastily" see here a feminine defeat?⁵⁴ If "Stabat Mater" is measured against a programmatic notion of motherhood that can assist women in their struggle to acquire a better status for themselves in the world, obviously it is lacking. But although Kristeva's intention is not to endorse feminism, nor is it solely to show that the "maternal body is the module of a biosocial program." (*Desire*: 241) The privileged link that a woman has with maternity is maintained in "Stabat Mater", despite the obscure way it is conceived and represented. Through the enunciative markers that inscribe a woman's desire, and through a narrative that operates on several levels at once by means of allusion, word plays, interposition of other discourses, irony, and ambivalence, Kristeva has foregrounded the crisis in meaning anticipated by motherhood and has extended the horizon of her discourse to a meditation on identity and primary narcissism that implicates us all.

⁵³ Grosz (1989), pp. 81-2.

⁵⁴ In other words, the "famous nativity of Piero della Francesca in London, in which Simone de Beauvoir too hastily saw a feminine defeat because the mother kneeled before her barely born son . . .", "Stabat Mater", p. 246.

"Stabat Mater" is hardly indifferent to the question of identity. Women and their relationships are quaintly represented as "a community of dolphins", (*Tales*: 257) but in case we find this metaphor too fanciful, we should not forget that it then allows Kristeva to ask what happens when the other woman wants to be considered a "singular" voyager? What happens if women wish to be intellectuals? The experience often has negative connotations: alone of all her sex, the female intellectual is rejected by this underwater community, either through indifference or through hatred of her unnatural, inconceivable ambition. These confessions persuade the reader that the personal stakes are indeed very large, and that personal affects are not as erased as Grosz has suggested.

The hostility levelled at Kristeva's reading of maternity arises, I believe, from two sources. Firstly, her preference for conducting a discourse at a high level of abstraction (done with obvious panache) is regarded as hostile to a deeply feminine need to insist that practice and experience are domesticated, that they are ultimately comforting and not estranging gestures. Intellectual activity must for feminists be accompanied with a corresponding degree of "objective" application. It must be "practical" and it must correspond to "*my*" experience. Thus Madelon Sprengnether writes: "Whereas Lacan believes that he can speak in the place of 'woman' without being one, women themselves seem to have greater difficulty in discriminating between the position of cultural disruption signified by the Imaginary and the fact of being female."⁵⁵ Figural reading strategies by women themselves sooner or later are intimately connected to the fact of being female. Our questions are our bodies. In these terms, "Stabat Mater" is only partially acquiescent, since it finally privileges modern art and not women as the most knowing source of maternal love. Secondly, a resistance arises precisely on the wound of primary narcissism, for in reading Kristeva we are led to ask whose mother is she talking about anyway: ours or hers? When we read Kristeva on the female intellectual do we let her discourse stand alone, or do we turn a blind

⁵⁵ Sprengnether (1990), p. 212.

eye to its alterity, its singularity, by expecting to find reproduced there our own memories of maternal care? It occurs to me that our responses to motherhood reflect a conceptual outpost we have constructed for ourselves in the face of what is perceived as Kristeva's out and out negativity: a last ditch stand against the forces of rationality, against intellectualising perhaps? Childbirth as both ultimate sacrifice and supreme reward is something we can't be deprived of, and an instinctive response on the part of women has been to put out a franchise on its discourse that will hedge it from life's losses. But this discourse sometimes binds itself in a wrapping of sentimentality - "I" to "my mother" - that "Stabat Mater" recognises and interrogates. We need a discourse such as the one offered in this essay as the necessary corrective to sentimentality that will accompany other narratives of motherhood, estranging through a profusion of metaphors its domestic mansion.

Of course, Kristeva doesn't really acknowledge that turning to Mary today is an antiquated gesture; probably limited to those (among whom I count myself) who feel the need to explore the founding myths of their own faith. In subsequent texts however, we read how Mary's unoccupied space has today collapsed back into widespread abjection. In *Tales of Love* the Virgin is seen as a "safety lock for feminine abjection" that has failed, and whose loss we have been unable to compensate for. Our secular society can admit no transcendent salvific identity, and in completely removing the maternal body from a renunciation of the flesh, Kristeva argues, social experience is marked by a growing hatred towards women, a kind of suffocating self-hatred by women, and a lonely narcissism for men. This culmination of negativity also appears in Kristeva's own writing. Thus one could argue that the earlier attempts to speak of maternal love or jouissance, admittedly always shadowed by ambivalence, eventually succumbed to a wholesale fear of femal sexual excess. "Stabat Mater" was only a temporary respite since there are Virgins no longer, only abject "females who can wreck the infinite," as Louis-Ferdinand Céline was to write in 1936.

4. 5. Abjection

. . . the boy could see her intimacy clearly, as if by its own phosphorescence. It exercised an absolute fascination upon him.

Her lips opened up as she howled so that she offered him, without her own intention or volition, a view of a set of Chinese boxes of whorled flesh that seemed to open one upon another into herself, drawing him into an inner, secret place in which destination perpetually receded before him, his first, devastating, vertiginous intimation of infinity.

Angela Carter⁵⁶

Today infinity explodes perspective, and the vertigo that terrified Peter into taking up religion is no longer enclosed by a woman's body but offers itself everywhere. The sky has left off holding up the heavens or as Angela Carter puts it, that "which they feared most, outside, was now indoors with them."⁵⁷ That the outcome of a fully secular logic should lead to a collapse of the space of intellectual reflection may come as no surprise to Kristeva's readers who are familiar with *Tales of Love*, but in *Powers of Horror* we witness a similar logic at work, yet with considerably less alleviation of the abjection such a collapse produces.

Abjection is a revolt of (and against) the being that gives us existence. Kristeva argues that before we have yet been formed as speaking beings and before our world has acquired the coherence of objects for us, there exists a strange borderline state we inhabit called abjection. Our identity runs all over the place, and in this phase of psychic development, whenever it meets up with boundaries and barriers, we experience a traumatic sense of upheaval. This moment therefore marks the beginnings of separation from the undifferentiated relationship previously experienced with the mother (thus "I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out". (*Powers*: 3)

⁵⁶ Angela Carter, "Peter and the Wolf" in *Black Venus* (London: Pan Books, 1986), p. 83.

⁵⁷ Carter (1986), p. 84.

Abjection and its characteristics can return to trouble us at any time, and *Powers of Horror* represents it as something that is as compelling as it is horrific - any sort of repulsive experience, in fact, that won't let us go, or whose images and affects cling on in the mind. Retching over the skin on the milk is a classic example; the horror of seeing a corpse another; even goosebumps that come from talk of witches, spirits, ghosts, and demon-possession can qualify. Usually violent physical sensations accompany abjection, and to feel abject, while partly a psychic experience, also often evokes bodily symptoms of discomfort. The threat of abjection comes from some "exorbitant" entity that is neither "us" nor "not us", but somewhere in between that summons up an archaic state in the development of the subject prior to the desire precipitated by the mirror-stage. Belonging strictly speaking neither to the Lacanian imaginary nor the symbolic it is not an object for an imaginary ego or an "ob-jest",⁵⁸ representative of the *fort/da* game and exemplary sign of symbolic desire.

Freud argued that the superego appeared at the same time as the castration complex when the child internalised the paternal prohibition on incestuous desires for the mother.⁵⁹ In Kristevan terminology, what the superego represses is the "jettisoned object", those aspects of my/my mother's body still caught up in instinctual drives, not yet differentiated from each other and thus not yet able to be articulated as signs. Expressed another way, this fallen object's presentation to consciousness as a "discharge" or "convulsion" is a return of the repressed. Abjection unchecked recalls a state *prior* to signification, where there are destructive, self-seeking drives, but no symbolic system in firm enough position to repress or displace these drives into speech (and/or appropriate cultural behaviour). The corpse "does not *signify* death." It *shows* it. (*Powers*: 3)

⁵⁸ The neologism in the original text reads "ob-jeu". See *Pouvoirs*, p. 9.

⁵⁹ "The Psychology of Women" in Jones ed. (1949), pp. 160ff.

When abjection does not trouble us, the superego is responsible for the repression of the unconscious, but when the superego is radically weakened, the

"unconscious" contents remain here *excluded* but in a strange fashion: not radically enough to allow for a secure differentiation between subject and object, and yet clearly enough for a defensive *position* to be established - one that implies a refusal but also a sublimating elaboration. (*Powers*: 7)

Here, sufficient structure or spacing has been given to the drives to organise them into a rudimentary pattern of pathways or articulations, but insufficient to definitively separate inside from outside, and subject from object. The abject is a realm where drives and signifiers are all mixed up; where there are some kinds of sublimating (symbolic) attachments, but only imperfect ones. As Kristeva notes, abjection is "a composite of judgement and affect, of condemnation and yearning, of signs and drives." (*Powers*: 10) That is why the abject person is the supreme example of the voyager, always straying, torn by these "somewhat Manichean" aspects and lacking a strong third term (paternal function) that will attach him securely to language and the symbolic (the Other).

Kristeva names the site of abjection the "land of oblivion". It is the place of want ("yearning") and affects, and not desire or signs.⁶⁰ This strange and nauseating place where hell is in the body and the body is in hell represents the state of primitive attachment to the mother that has never been fully left behind. How can we understand its structure? To function as subjects under the law of the Other, I am *like* someone else in order to be myself (this is what Kristeva terms the *mimetic* "logic of the advent of the ego, objects, and signs", and recalls the mirror-stage and subsequent experiences that initiate us into subjecthood). The conventional Lacanian triangle for subjectivity is composed of three points: the ego ("moi"), the id or the unconscious ("Es") and the Other ("Autre"). But when

⁶⁰ As a "primitive structuration of difference", abjection is not related to desire, sign and the object, but to primal wants and drives in the unconscious which block or severely impair the symbolic function. See Deborah Linderman's review of *Powers of Horror* in *Sub-Stance*, Vol. 13, No's. 3&4, (1984), p. 140.

the symbolic function's normalising claims are partly excluded by the subject, the Other comes to inhabit him as his "alter ego". Accordingly, a borderline patient who suffers from abjection will be unable to differentiate between his own subjective space and another's. He will view himself as an ideal for an Other (originally his mother), and thus as having a *false* self or selves. In formal terms, the resulting triangle - "a topology of catastrophe" (*Powers*: 9) - is composed of the "stray" instead of the ego, the object or non-object in place of the object, and the Other as alterego for the swallowed up subject. The claims of the Other on the subject now cause horror, violence and "sublime alienation" where "I" becomes not singular ("moi"), but heterogeneous. Jouissance is a result of this unstable place dominated by want.

Like motherhood, abjection is a place of limits and boundaries and its topography is one of ambivalent borders, where exteriority (secondary repression) collapses into interiority (primary repression). The voyager experiences the journey as one of incessant but frustrated motion. He cannot separate himself from what needs to be left behind. When Freud listened to his patients, he discovered that they repressed painful or anxiety-producing memories and developed compensatory "fixations". He hypothesised that for repression to occur, there must be some hypothetical primary experience that was subsequently repressed *as* the unconscious and which provided the nexus for all future repressions *in* the unconscious :

We have reason to assume that there is a *primal repression*, a first phase of repression, which consists in the psychical (ideational) representative of the instinct being denied entrance into the conscious. With this a *fixation* is established; the representative in question persists unaltered from then onwards and the instinct remains attached to it.⁶¹

He decided that this first memory was caused by the "primal scene": the scene "of sexual intercourse between the parents which the child observes, or infers on the

⁶¹ "Repression", SE XIV, p. 146.

basis of certain indications, and phantasies. It is generally interpreted by the child as an act of violence on the part of the father."⁶² Here we have, according to Freud, the beginnings of castration anxiety. From the time of the formation of the superego, a succession of signs (ideational or psychic representations) delegate the drives a position in the unconscious. Fixation is an illustration of how these repressed drives are designated a signifier or representation in conscious life where through *secondary repression* signifiers take their place in a larger economy of signs.

Freud also hinted that primal repression may be even more primitive than this clearly essentialist Oedipal history described above; in fact, it may lie in the very first kinds of defensive organisation undergone by the drives when meeting an external threat: "It is highly probable that the immediate precipitating causes of primal repressions are quantitative factors such as an excessive degree of excitation and the breaking through of the protective shield against stimuli."⁶³ Kristeva takes up this speculative point of Freud's to locate the outer boundaries of primal repression in pre-Oedipal abjection, suggesting that abjection itself lays down "an enigmatic foundation" (*Powers*: 11) of repression, long before the formation of ego and superego.⁶⁴ She then proceeds to redefine primal repression as "the ability of the speaking being, always already haunted by the Other, to divide, reject, repeat." (*Powers*: 12) The incessant attempt to mark out that precarious boundary line between animality and language is a characteristic borderline experience. However, Kristeva still retains elements of Freud's essentialism, since she further acknowledges that primary repression is "the prohibition placed on the maternal body (as a defense against autoeroticism and incest taboo)." (*Powers*: 14) These two implicated emphases (abjection as a structure and spacing activity indispensable to the later structurings of language, and

⁶² Laplanche, J. and Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. D. Nicholson Smith (London: Hogarth Press, 1973), p. 335.

⁶³ *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*, SE XX, p. 94.

⁶⁴ "The matter of the object sets in motion, or implicates, the entire Freudian structure." (*Powers*, p. 33)

abjection as a revolt against a maternal entity) are present throughout *Powers of Horror*.

Before mimesis then, before that pure "wrinkleless" image that stares back at us from the mirror, we are cut-up, divided, muddled, by the non-being of abjection. Separation between the primary and secondary orders of repression and between the ego and "narcissistic perturbation" is not clear cut; indeed, the drives return as a surplus to the system of signs, being particularly evident in perverse or artistic practices. The psychic conditions that facilitate such a return include moments when either the subject's superego is so strong that they block out a desire for a relation to an other (an individual, speech, culture's collective values), or when this other is too weak. In either case as Kristeva notes, the centrifugal motion that attached signifiers to drives and moved them away from the ego goes astray, and turns back toward the "same", (*Powers*: 15) blurring the distinctions (the *space*) already set up between ego and object.

Clearly, abjection is not just a pathological condition present in borderline patients and in artistic and religious activities. Its peculiar organisation *founds* the signifying economy, and its characteristics of "rejecting, separating, repeating/abjecting" (*Powers*: 15) are present in the symbolic in any cultural and intellectual activities relating to denial and negation, differentiation, repetition, moving from inside to outside, setting up boundaries: "Defilement is what is jettisoned from the '*symbolic system*'. It is what escapes that social rationality, that logical order on which a social aggregate is based, which then becomes differentiated from a temporary agglomeration of individuals and, in short, constitutes a *classification system* or a *structure*." (*Powers*: 65)

The subject of abjection is an exile preoccupied not with his name but about his place, which Kristeva tells us he endlessly builds and rebuilds. If abjection is a disorder associated with the mirror stage, its subject demonstrates quite serious

problems with living and conceptualising space. When our first attempts at marking off a boundary that will eventually distinguish us from the mother are stifled, then the necessary linkage between psychic interior and a material exterior never develops, or it does so only in the most rudimentary of forms. Under the shadow of a maternal relation that is too sexual, too (auto)erotic, the abject person constructs his own shaky dwelling. Never able to fully depart from the first "natural mansion", his work is always in progress; estranged from notions of fixity and rest, ceaselessly on the run, he can never get far enough from a devouring interior that threatens his fragile sense of identity.

In a paper on narcissism, Freud had suggested a possible causal relation between the organisation of the body and the organisation of the ego: "For every such change of erotogenicity of the organs, there might then be a parallel change of libidinal cathexis in the ego."⁶⁵ The ego and consciousness rely for their initial organisation and coherence on a sense of corporeality: "The ego is first and foremost a bodily ego; it is not merely a surface entity, but is itself the projection of a surface."⁶⁶ When the body fails to acquire a coherent psychic and conceptual spatial organisation, there has been a corresponding failure to perceive the physical space occupied by the body. Obviously these two modes of perception (interior and exterior) are interrelated, and abjection occurs when their mutual differentiation is frustrated. In fact, when differentiation does not occur successfully, the materiality of the drives (the most primitive form of interior, psychic space,) returns to add a dangerous overlay of negativity to the subject's now neither present nor absent identity: "The body's inside, in that case, shows up in order to compensate for the collapse of the border between inside and outside. It is as if the skin, a fragile container, no longer guaranteed the integrity of one's 'own and clean self' but, scraped or transparent, invisible or taut, gave way before the defecation of its contents." (*Powers*: 53) Hollowed out yet crushed beneath the weight

⁶⁵ "On Narcissism", SE XIV, p. 84. Elizabeth Grosz has also observed this relation in Freud between body and ego. See especially pp. 31-2.

⁶⁶ "The Ego and the Id", SE XIX, p. 26.

of an intimate infinity, the abject person is caught in a place of shattered forms, remainders and residues. The sublime is powerfully present in abjection, but unable to be supported or sustained by language, its epiphanies have the tendency to collapse on to the subject's own body, causing it to fragment or become dejected. Kristeva believes that the profound ambiguity of abjection is at its most relentless in literature, which manages at the same time to provide some form of cathartic relief through sublimation.

The role assigned to the Virgin Mary had been one of silent suffering. Contrary to hysteria however, which never creatively produces language, the subject of abjection is accorded a special place. The abject's "symptom is the rejection and reconstruction of languages", (*Powers*: 45) and the writer is a subject who transfers primary phobic fears of a too present mother through metaphor on to the literary text. The "signifier that terrified, flees its signified" (*Powers*: 49) is the transposition into language of this life or death struggle and is at its most extreme when the literary text appears to split the signifier from the signified and reinvest "acoustic, tactile, motor, visual" factors (*Powers*: 53) with affect. Is the reader mistaken then, to connect the topology of abjection with the body of the mother or more drastically, with women? If Victor Burgin is correct, ultimately, it is "not woman *as such* who is abjected, but rather woman as privileged signifier of that which man both fears and desires: the extinction of identity itself."⁶⁷

How can we read *Powers of Horror* without being overwhelmed with loathing for the female body? How can we recognise abjection without gouging out our eyes? Here is Kristeva's response: restraining abjection is possible if, and only if, "we hear in language - and not in the other nor in the other sex - the gouged-out eye, the wound, the basic incompleteness that conditions the indefinite quest of signifying concatenations." (*Powers*: 88-9) She reiterates that language, and not unmediated experience, is our daily reality. If we wish to avoid falling into

⁶⁷ "Geometry and Abjection", in Fletcher and Benjamin eds. (1990), p. 117.

perpetual conflict with the other (sex), we must let language, particularly literature, absorb our terror, our aggression, and our disappointment, not to mention our identity:

So I listen to the black, heterogeneous territory of the body/text; I coil my jouissance within it, I cast it off, I sidestep its own, in a cold fire where murder is no longer the murder of the other, but rather, of the other who thought she was I, of me who thought I was the other, of me, you, us - of personal pronouns therefore, which no longer have much to do with all this. (*Desire*: 163)

Nonetheless, it is impossible to keep the pure borders of theorising about abjection ("woman as privileged signifier") from drawing on a reservoir of personal affect (woman *as such*) and implicating both in a horror of the "monstrous-feminine". In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva aligns abjection, the grotesque and the maternal. One of its most objectionable aspects is the attitude to birth, and in the following passage, Kristeva makes little attempt to distinguish herself from the position she is describing, thus:

When Céline locates the ultimate of abjection - and thus the supreme and sole interest of literature - in the birth-giving scene, he makes amply clear which fantasy is involved: something horrible to see at the impossible doors of the invisible - the mother's body. The scene of scenes is here not the so-called primal scene but the one of giving birth, incest turned inside out, flayed identity." (*Powers*: 155)

This distaste, along with the abject femininity of prostitutes and scheming married women ("females who can wreck the infinite"), is merely the other side of the artist's fascination with the woman as "Ideal, artistically inclined, dedicated to beauty . . . the focus of . . . [his] gaze." (p. 157) Céline's attraction to good bone structure in women is something that Kristeva can't take her eyes off, and I suspect that in a subliminal sense, it is homologous to her own preference for the good lines of form. The asexual, the child and the homosexual woman are categories that appeal to Céline because they do not offer a female bodily lining to the male gaze, thereby transmuting all the more easily into form. Comments

Kristeva, not without narcissism: "A ballerina is the most perfect example of it, preferably a foreigner - the opposite of the mother language, without language if need be, all sensitivity and acrobatics." (*Powers*: 166) One can tolerate the eccentricity of Céline's personal tastes however, without turning them into a dissertation on the conjunction of abjection and the sublime. Kristeva's fascination for Céline's discourse is such that she has elevated his narrative of hatred and fear into a universal condition.

Apparently, abjection is the prerogative of psychotics who are bound to fantasies of the phallic mother through refusing to introject as verbalisations what they incorporate of her. As a result, they believe that castration literally occurs (that is, they refuse, in a certain way, to accept the incest prohibition).⁶⁸ Jennifer Stone tellingly criticises Kristeva for her literal and therefore borderline psychotic reading of Freud.⁶⁹ In the same way that psychotics believe the mother to have the power of castration, and in the same way that they acquiesce to the negativity of the drives over symbolisation, Kristeva mimics their disassociated condition, and *mimics Céline* in the horrific place she accords to the maternal function. Psychological and linguistic aberrations, made homologous through the intervening figure of the abhorrent mother, are seen firstly as the precondition of language, and secondly as its indispensable inner lining which reveals itself most particularly in the literary text. *Spaltung*, first used as a term to describe schizophrenia and developed by Lacan in his explanation of how the subject enters and remains a split being in language, here takes on a new dimension as we see its presence manifested as acute condition in the theoretical discourse of Kristeva.⁷⁰ The phallic mother appears to have considerably more than descriptive and metaphorical status in her work. Presenting itself as symptom in the troubled writings of Céline, its phantasmatic presence is no less apparent in the

⁶⁸ On this point, see Juliet Flower MacCannell, "Kristeva's Horror" in *Semiotica* (1986).

⁶⁹ "The Horrors of Power; a Critique of 'Kristeva'", in Francis Barker et al eds. (1983), p. 43. Stone further remarks that Kristeva's moving constantly between horror and attraction, subject and object, is "a Freudian paradigm for neurosis", p. 45.

⁷⁰ See the commentary on "spaltung" offered by Laplanche and Pontalis (1973), pp. 274-9.

case of the analyst, where its description invokes Kristeva's fascinated acquiescence (incorporation) instead of critique (introjection).

A more sympathetic reading comes from Jacqueline Rose, who accepts the necessity for the emerging subject to acquire language at the expense of separation from the mother. She outlines the problematic nature of Kristeva's theory of abjection that "arms itself with a concept of femininity as different, as something other to the culture as it is known, only to find itself face to face with or even entrenched within, the most grotesque and fully cultural stereotypes of femininity itself. Unlike some of her most virulent detractors, Kristeva knows, however, that these images are not so easily dispatched."⁷¹ Rose appears to consider abjection to be a sustainable psychic structure,⁷² but other critics have attempted to avoid the image of the monstrous feminine through radically altering analytical presuppositions. Reading the body of the (M)other in psychoanalysis, Madelon Sprengnether argues that if we see this figure as pure materiality that must be repressed by the symbolic system, it will continue to precipitate abjection. She advances an alternative argument that suggests if we were to abandon the notion of an originary condition of plenitude (along with its support, the phallic mother), then the always already estranged condition of the mother's body would provide a paradigm for differentiation and subjectivity instead of being an entity that threatens subjectivity. "It is not necessary," Sprengnether continues, "to invoke the function or signification of the phallus to arrive at such a representation of development. The body of the (m)other provides its own sources of signification and ultimately a ground for reconciliation between the preOedipal (m)other and culture, between the (m)other and the symbolic order."⁷³

⁷¹ Rose (1986), p. 157.

⁷² Comments Rose, "The body appears at the origin of language, not as idealisation, therefore, but as that which places both the subject and language most fundamentally at risk." In Rose (1991), p. 34.

⁷³ Sprengnether (1990), p. 234.

Although a provocative suggestion, Sprengnether's model of the mother as the site of an always already elegiac loss is to paradoxically inscribe, as Kristeva would say, "the fantasy of a phallic mother playing at the phallus game all by herself, alone and complete", (*Tales*: 44) or at least not to attribute loss to its correct source. This is because an originary differentiation of the mother's body still depends on its orientation towards something else (the precondition of loss, absence). Estrangement thus rests on the desire of the Other: in Lacanian terminology, the desire for the phallus. (*Tales*: 40) Even so, the plenitude that is shattered with the entrance of the other on to the scene of desire (Kristeva will in *Tales of Love* name this first other as precipitating love, rather than desire) is only a hypothetical state, much like the "big bang" theory that attempts to account for the origin of the universe. As Lechte notes, "In my unarticulated fantasy, then, I desire the idyllic state which existed before my separation from my object. Before separation, too, all my desires were satisfied; in fact, desire as such did not exist, and I wished for nothing."⁷⁴ If such an emphasis is an indispensable presupposition for Lacan, Kristeva's position is more ambivalent. While accepting that the entry into language consists in a separation from "a presumed state of . . . pleasure fused with nature so that . . . an articulated network of differences . . . may constitute *meaning*," ("WT": 198) she also indicates that prior to the advent of the symbolic proper, the child's universe is infiltrated by markers, by structured points (of light, colour, touch, sound) around which meaning will eventually cohere.⁷⁵ These are pre-symbolic nodes that in some respects position the child in relation to a less than replete maternal container. Secondly, Kristeva's theory of abjection is a further attempt to show this fantasised state of completeness as already pierced by the child's attempt at breaking away from autoerotic space in conjunction with the mother's orientation towards an other. Abjection breaks out when this other is not yet established as sufficiently separate and/or loving.

⁷⁴ Lechte (1990), p. 159.

⁷⁵ See further evidence for this, for instance, in the essay "Place Names", in *Desire*, pp. 271-294.

If the Other were not to be included in the above scenario as an entity or position separate from the mother, the result would be a stifling enclosure between mother and child sustaining, rather than dissolving abjection, and setting materiality up as diametrically opposed to the symbolic. What interests me in *Powers of Horror* is that on one level there appears to be *no* relief from abjection. "Stabat Mater" had offered us the more reconciled vision of the mother as both a loving identity and a means of access to the "divine": "Eia mater, fons amoris . . .". In "Stabat Mater", Kristeva's own personal biography supplements rather than detracts from the celebration, even though it maintains a belief in the real likelihood of a paranoid, if not phallic feminine experience. Four years later in *Powers of Horror*, the representation of the mother's body no longer offers consolation to those who suffer, but instead provokes horror, hatred, and disgust.

An initial impression appears to be that Kristeva's quest for estrangement has led the writer to forget her own "space" and leap to a jubilant identification with the body of Céline's texts. The female voyager identifies herself with Céline's voyage through the night. As she writes of Bataille in another context: "Experience, its authority and method cannot be distinguished from its contestation."⁷⁶ Just as abjection fails to distinguish between subject and object, the experience of horror and its intimate connection with maternal space cannot easily be distinguished here from its critique. When we read Céline and Kristeva on Céline, the language of the text fails to offer us consolation for the rottenness, the horrible sticky violence that streams from the representation of a maternal relation now utterly deprived of love. Reading Kristeva on abjection therefore has real effects, even if these must be registered as fantasies arising from the imaginary.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ "L'expérience et la pratique" in *Polylogue* (1977), p. 107.

⁷⁷ See Rose (1986), p. 159. Although Rose seems to stipulate that the affects produced by abjection are transformed through linguistic structures into effects experienced as fantasies, I have at various points throughout this thesis preferred the term affect. As I argue, the experience of separation carries a component of ambivalence and uncertainty. This undecidability supports the persistence of affects with their closer relationship to the drives, as well as effects which of course submit more fully to the symbolic.

To what extent is this impression sustained? Can critique be cleanly railed off from empathetic listening in the text? Is there a catharsis of suffering which emerges through reading, despite everything? How is Kristeva's own enunciative position a response to the effects of abjection on the discourse that produces her as woman and as analyst (intellectual)?

Since *Powers of Horror* was intended as "something other than an intellectual exercise", (*Powers*: 209) we can assume that the writer, far from establishing herself as a disengaged observer contemplating the object, instead identifies herself with it. Yet throughout that fascinating and repellant journey, Kristeva labours to construct a speaking voice that will move between identification *and* analysis, between abject proximity *and* interpretation: "'You have to have been *removed* from the spot'" writes Céline in *Entretiens avec le professeur Y*.⁷⁸ Her study of abjection is an elaboration of a phenomenology of reading characterised by a considerable degree of reflexivity, where the text represents and scrutinises the affects produced from the speaker's intimate engagement with the space of abjection, and the bearing of this abjection on the practice of reading. As Kristeva remarks, "When reading Céline we are seized at that fragile spot of subjectivity . . ." (*Powers*: 135) and abjection seizes us similarly because it occurs "within our personal archaeology". At times then, the text's discourse is produced at a distance from the writing subject, whose utterance thematises (reflects on) the nature of subjectivity; at other times the enunciation seems to overwhelm the writing subject to produce abjection.

What redeems *Powers of Horror* in my judgement is the fact that the writer's reflexivity leads her eventually beyond an identification with Céline to an elaboration of a different relation to the theoretical object (and hence to the notion of space) that a woman's discourse may, under certain circumstances, produce. One

⁷⁸ Quoted in *Powers*, p. 138.

of the distinguishing characteristics of the borderline experience of abjection is that its weak relation to the Other as a third term results in two warring factions, each reducing the other to abjection: "Nature, the body, the inside. Facing the spirit, others, appearances." (*Powers*: 143) Kristeva suggests that the closed-in nature of the binary relation (the real pitting itself against the symbolic) could be opened up by an influx of the imaginary, an investment in seeming and appearances. Elsewhere she indicates that women do not experience the abject in the same way that men do; usually they "*imagine* rather than experience abjection." (*Powers*: 144, my emphasis) Thus in reading Céline, we are informed that the writer is "*seemingly*" going to deal with a number of themes. Playing on the potential investment women have in the imaginary (recalling the figure of the female voyager in "From Ithaca to New York"), she takes up this potentiality and uses it as the site from which, coyly, to confront truth bereft of seeming, an abject truth "without makeup". (*Powers*: 143)⁷⁹ The woman and the analyst at this point coalesce as a privileged kind of home from which to view abjection and through its interpretation, to restore a cathartic discourse/distance of seeming ("makeup") to the standoff that has developed between the real (the woman's body, or unmediated matter) and the symbolic (theorising about interiority). Which in the light of her remarks on the privileged position of women intellectuals, acquires considerable resonance.

In "Stabat Mater" Kristeva argued that maternal love was a necessary comfort to the speaking being at times of suffering, "a refuge when his/her symbolic shell cracks and a crest emerges where speech causes biology to show through". (*Tales*: 263) If the figure of Mary has now become obsolete, there is the implication that her sublime body which absorbs suffering will henceforth be transferred to the body of the (maternal) analyst who suffers with her analysands that she might assist them in becoming resurrected beings. The role of the analyst is thus both sacrificial and fully maternal. As a form of catharsis, analysis *offers a shelter* to

⁷⁹ The pun works in French and English. The original text gives the expression, "sans fard" (without pretence). "Le fard" additionally means paint or makeup. See *Pouvoirs*, p. 168.

the suffering subject and effects not purification but a "rebirth with and against abjection." (*Powers*: 31) For unless analysts (and critics) permit their discourse to be affected by the estranging qualities of abjection, then speech will not be transformative, renewing or sublime, but will block the productive forces that have assisted in its birth.

At this point a brief detour is necessary to explore the significance of catharsis. According to Antoinin Artaud, literature provides a cathartic release for the "'anguish of its time' by 'animating, attracting, lowering onto its shoulders the wandering anger of a particular time for the discharge of its psychological evil-being.'"⁸⁰ Kristeva's account of the origins of cathartic literature in *Revolution in Poetic Language* suggested that the rituals which accompanied sacrifice were orgiastic, violent celebrations that acted out the anticipated, sacrificial violence through dance and what she calls a "deluge of the signifier". Perhaps they were the first formalised practices to represent the cathartic flow of jouissance into language. In any case, locating ritual alongside sacrifice led her to claim a similarly privileged status for literature which like a morally cathected magnet, draws to itself a society's imminent violence and dissipates it through its ritualistic, formal structures.

But can literature deflect social animosity by providing structures that allow for an interchange of inside and outside without promoting abjection? In *Powers of Horror* the cathartic experience receives the following definition: "A discourse of sex that is not the discourse of knowledge - it is the only possible catharsis. That discourse is audible, and through the speech that it mimics it repeats on another register what the latter (knowledge) does not say." (*Powers*: 28-9) The "discourse of sex" circumvents knowledge because its informing energies do not arise from the consciousness, but from the unconscious which can never be known in conventional terms. Speech which comes from the unconscious is like

⁸⁰ Artaud, cited in "From One Identity to Another", *Desire*, p. 137.

ventriloquism, a voice thrown from a distance, which as we have seen in Chapter Three, is an obliquely inflected enunciative position that works by saying what it does not seem to say. It is this distance of another register (literature as mediating abjection, analytical speech as mediating a woman's "voice") that effects catharsis. Mimetic identification, an act that I have suggested is the prerogative of the feminine in Kristeva, is the enabling mechanism of transposition as spacing, but its energies do not simply repeat information or reinscribe with exactitude a phenomenological object (woman, for instance). On the contrary, they creatively transform it. Through "the 'poetic' unsettling of analytic utterance [the text] . . . testifies to its closeness to, cohabitation with, and 'knowledge' of abjection." (*Powers*: 30) Kristeva's enunciative "I" that mediates the disintegrative effects of abjection on identity follows its "skewed topology", giving us the impression that the boundaries of the subject of enunciation are under threat of collapse, a collapse whose proximity is elaborated by *style* as much as theme. But if style is intimately related to the relief of an intolerable closeness, how does style as catharsis bear on the place of the female analyst?

Powers of Horror does not disguise its ambivalent investment in phenomenology and personal narrative, which is probably why it is so vulnerable, ironically, to feminist critique. The effect of reading Céline and reading Kristeva on Céline is "quite other . . . It calls upon what within us, eludes defenses, trainings, and words, or else struggles against them. A nakedness, a forlornness, a sense of having had it; discomfort, a downfall, a wound . . .". (*Powers*: 134) It causes Kristeva to recall the discomforts of her own childhood experiences; to emulate abjection's hold by continuously naming, designating, repeating, in her own use of style; to play, like Céline, with the homely, colloquial turn of phrase ("How come?"); to ask question after question; to recreate lyrically the ecstatic experience that she believes occurs where abjection comes close to the sublime: "When the starry sky, a vista of open seas or a stained glass window shedding purple beams fascinate me, there is a cluster of meaning, of colours, of words, of caresses, there

are light touches, scents, sighs, cadences that arise, shroud me, carry me away, and sweep me beyond the things that I see, hear, or think . . .". (*Powers*: 12)

In the above meticulous elaboration of Célinian style, we are additionally offered a commentary on the nature of the reading (analytical) relationship. Quoting Leo Spitzer's analysis of Céline, Kristeva explains the "mutual combat and fascination" between subject and addressee, a paradigm for abjection, as a tearing in subjectivity between a preposing subject who is too self-confident and a subject who constantly supplements information offered, indicating a lack of confidence in both the self and the other. Somewhat like the struggle within manic eros that Kristeva has observed at work in Plato's *Phaedrus*,⁸¹ the fascination the subject feels when he approaches the other and then draws away from its threat is to construct the abject person as someone who finds himself simultaneously in more than one place. Kristeva uses this analysis to demonstrate how enunciation subverts grammar and logic in Céline, but the resonances can be interpreted more liberally still, I feel. Surely we have in the following comment an elaboration of the problematics of reading (and analysis): "The binary message thus effects a shift from the *I* of pleasure to the *you* of the addressee and to the impersonal *one* that is necessary for the establishment of a truly universal syntax." (*Powers*: 196) On its most fundamental level, this is an explanation of how the doubling or spacing within enunciation between narcissism and objectification paves the way for a subjectivity that can begin to distinguish between outside and inside. Secondly, it suggests how abjection may be mediated through the third term of writing and analytical speech (that is, the Other as language) in a way that *Revolution in Poetic Language* had been unable to. Thirdly, it contains a more nuanced observation that to be in at least two places at once is symptomatic of the transactions and uncertainties that occur within reading, and that occur when *female* intellectuals take up the question of style. Such a confession is what Kristeva's discourse skirts but if it is to be consistent,

⁸¹ See *Tales*, pp. 62-9.

cannot say directly. With Kristeva, like Céline, we forget that "[s]he can show it to us only because [s]he stands elsewhere . . . within writing." (*Powers*: 134)

From an uncertain distance then, we follow this journey through maternal space, certainly horrified, but probably also even fascinated by a reading experience which may, if we submit to its style, lead us to the very edge of our identity as speaking beings.

The indeterminacy of identity is a metaphor for the indeterminacy of reading, which is illustrated in *Powers of Horror* by an account of phobia. Fear and object are linked, Kristeva argues, because the passage of the drives is checked in the process of separation and this frustration produces a phobic distress which nevertheless is unable to find its place in speech. The phobic is frightened not only by the all-powerful mother, but also at the prospect of separation or castration. Because such a position is "non-representable", reflecting that of "*a drive economy in want of an object*", (*Powers*: 35) he displaces his anxieties on to some improbable object: for little Hans, it is horses. Kristeva takes the impossible entity of the maternal phallus as the ultimate origin of all fantasy, and while it is clear that phobia is concerned with the anguish surrounding separation from this object, it is not quite so obvious from the exposition in *Powers of Horror* that want is predicated equally on separation's antithesis: that is, fusion. Yet I think such an emphasis is clearly intended. Phobia is a condition where its subject dreads maternal fusion, but equally fears separation from the mother. Agreeing with Freud that little Hans is afraid of castration, Kristeva proceeds to turn his passive subject position - "I am afraid of being bitten" - inside out by remarking that underlying paranoia (the bad object threatens from the outside) is an anxiety over one's own devouring mouth - "I am afraid of biting." What is termed "syntactic passivation" (*Powers*: 39) is a necessary procedure in the subject's uncanny ability to simultaneously maintain and separate from the maternal *within* by putting himself in ambivalent relation to the object, hence:

"the ab/object is me; I am afraid of the ab/object."

Kristeva uses this recognition to move the phobic person (and the origins of subjectivity) away from incorporation to the support that can be provided by language and the speech of the other. Unlike hysteria, abjection (which includes phobia, as well as perversion and obsession) turns from constructing an index of somatic symptoms to indicating want through signs. Its subject makes a metaphorical leap from phantasmatic pre-objects to signs, whereas the specular ego, according to Kristeva, is taken up with chasing phenomenal objects. In a sense we could see this distinction as alluding to the appropriate way to read abjection, which must be understood in its most vital sense not as a discourse on the horror that pertains to a phenomenal object - woman - but rather an attempt to privilege literature through elaborating the figure of the "mother" as the dread of an unnameable "void". *Powers of Horror* argues that this dread is an inseparable aspect of the separating activity that constructs us as speaking beings and is both brought to light and mitigated through signification and most especially through the literary text's access to the sublime - that is, to alterity. But could we not also agree that just as the relation to the phobic object represents what Kristeva calls "an avoidance of choice", in the same way the processes of separation and abjecting may reflect a similar avoidance? That an indeterminacy of identity underpins all subsequent states of "separateness", and that the pleasures of maternal fusion cause us to relinquish a clean and proper castration in favour of a relation that is thoroughly ambivalent and that by the same token, cannot entirely forsake filling the void with an embodied entity, "more or less" phenomenal? And by extension, couldn't castration be understood as a gap and/or a knot, with the difference being indistinguishable? In which case to understand separation as the dominant narrative of love and abjection, as does Lechte, is perhaps underreading. For if the fear that links itself to the emerging object is both a fear of separation and a fear that separation will not take place, we would then need to read Kristeva as profoundly more ambivalent on the

question of "woman" than a first glance would imply.

At one point in the text, there is the suggestion that contemporary feminism's privileging everything prior to symbolisation as feminine aligns itself with Céline's anti-Semitism. (*Powers*: 180) Later Kristeva adds that the Jew (read feminism in its struggle for power) makes the Aryan feel unnaturally feminine and masochistic. Where does the woman stand here? On the side of the anti-Semite? The Jew? Or both? And how can we be saved from gouging out our eyes in this stand-off where both parties are implicated in abjection? If woman may claim identification with Céline *or* his protagonist, and if Kristeva by implication casts woman as both envied "subject" and hateful "object", then woman's position in signification must be the chosen sign of signification's uncertainty.

Woman's "place", the product of a spacing gesture that is never entirely complete, is therefore neither quite empty (a signifier), nor a replete "home" (the ego, which Kristeva considers to be the "reflection of the maternal phallus"). Moving between and confusing the distinction between the two sites of representation (imaginary and symbolic), the "real" is both elaborated and displaced. The space of abjection that crosses the boundaries of language and pre-language, paternal and maternal, castration as painful wound and castration as denial, offers us a commentary on the complexity of a woman's relationship with that space - neither within abjection, nor outside of it; neither its "object", nor fully removed from its borders either. I would argue that Kristeva's reading of abjection knowingly mimes the indeterminacy that abjection *is* and in so doing, pays a considerable debt to hysteria, despite evidence to the contrary. The woman who approaches abjection through writing inhabits it differently, improperly perhaps. Never fully at home in the body nor fully at ease within signs, the writer's body, both "heimisch" and "unheimlich", is (seemingly) her text. I suspect that the estrangement produced by inhabiting improperly is what the writer of *Powers of*

Horror desires above all else.

Why is it though that when I read this text I am immediately struck by the force of hatred and aggression that is directed at the maternal body? And why do I along with other critics instinctively rush to connect such hatred with "woman" and then with "me"? As in "Stabat Mater" is the point the abject mother, or primary narcissism? The signifier, or my experience as a woman and mother? Can women simultaneously name the exile of Being and be different names? And is my reading reaction misguided, straying across places (the ego, phenomenology) where it has no business? Or in imaginatively feeling myself closer to this archaic object, am I not beginning to elaborate a kind of reading that is not so much wrong as different? A difference that may lie, if we work within the psychoanalytical narrative, in a different relation to the phallus, and one that Lacan has expressed as the difference between being and having (the phallus). Yet once more, even a reading that begins with specular identifications is caught within the displacing logic of signification. Nor can it neglect the complex effects of separation, through which we all must pass to take up the order of signs. Kristeva's exchange with abjection incorporates a phenomenological approach and thus gratifies even as she wounds the reader's narcissism, but while not relinquishing phenomenology, voyages beyond its limits to find and name, like the phobic, an impossible lost object - Heidegger's "Nothing" - whose recovery eludes every speaking being regardless of their sex.

4. 6. Speaking of love

The speaking being is a wounded being, his speech wells up out of an aching for love, and the "death drive" (Freud) or the "unbeing" (Lacan) that are coextensive with human nature determine, if they do not justify them, the discontents of civilisations.

Julia Kristeva, *Tales of Love*

Love and love's losses are universal experiences but they are also, as Julia Kristeva reminds us, universal topics of conversation. In speaking of love we lose our sense of ourselves and the securities of dwelling; thus, she argues, is the speaking being and the nature of being itself transformed. But if we are to be loving subjects, the modalities of enunciation available must contain structures able to shelter loving speech. *Powers of Horror* had unveiled a speaking subject locked within abjection, unable to transcend the stray: abject polarity. With abjection, a failing or absent paternal function causes the third term, the Other, to be overly harsh or sporadic, and when conditions are at their most extreme, or when they are unable to find cathartic release in literature, the subject finds himself broken in pieces, no longer capable of finding the idealisations necessary for life and love to exist.

Tales of Love is the working out of this dilemma; the attempt to accommodate the speaking subject in relation to a loving, mediative Other.⁸² Given that the collapse of Christianity has, according to Kristeva, deprived our speech of mystery and left us with no transcendent space to absorb abjection, this text aims to designate a subject of enunciation whose reflections on love are supported and maintained by a new third term - the Imaginary Father. Once, the ideals of romance - and religion - consisted in bringing together the figures of a loving father and a nurturing mother, whose happy duality would be further cemented through the bonds of parenthood. In *Tales of Love*, Kristeva argues that changes in Western society have so eroded these boundaries that we have become fragmented individuals, estranged, shipwrecked beings who can find no self-image with which to feel at home. Nor can we reach out to others - our love objects are irretrievably lost, indifferent, or punitive. If idealisation is lacking, so too is catharsis: conventional social structures, habitual patterns of speech and ideal images fail to absorb pain and violence and so alleviate the burden of human suffering. But the solution, Kristeva maintains, is not to return us to

⁸² Kristeva's Other in *Tales of Love* is mediative in relation to the subject, but is itself *unmediated*.

couple love, narcissistic self-love, and Oedipal love which may be dead ends in themselves. Nor is it to return to an unproblematic notion of metaphysics. Rather she advocates an opening out of these enclosures to the mediating influence of a loving but imaginary figure: a point, place or structure able to absorb the shocks and disappointments of human love simply because it draws its subjects in a loving gaze directed away from something enclosed towards an elsewhere. It is thus a new kind of perspective that is offered in *Tales of Love*: not the vanishing point of a perspective that supports absolute transcendence; nor the abject collapse of contemplative thought in upon itself; instead Kristeva puts forward the argument that the aporias of love and intellectual reflection call for a new form of dwelling altogether; a space that will be lovingly transformative without endorsing metaphysics on the one hand or an unmitigated nihilism on the other.

The history of love subsequently developed assumes two levels of estrangement at work. Firstly as we have seen, the crisis of contemporary subjectivity appears to lie in the fact that today we no longer have a code, or an interpretative strategy to understand love. Love has lost both its mystery and its conviction. Which means that we cannot recognise love, or respond to it affectively. Our sickness, or homelessness, is caused by a lack of stable mirrors in which we can identify ourselves as anything other than "empty dilapidated castle[s]". (*Powers*: 186) This kind of narcissistic crisis is one that numerous analysts have also referred to,⁸³ and in isolating its nature, Kristeva is deliberately distancing herself from the earlier more unambiguous celebration of loss. However, the second order of the crisis is a trauma inherent in the very nature of love, as Kristeva defines it. Love is a "narcissistic wound" which in putting us beside ourselves and for another, "never dwells in us without burning us." (*Tales*: 4) Here, the state of love is more connected with identity's abject disintegration than its harmonious

⁸³ See, for instance, Jessica Benjamin's "The Decline of the Oedipus Complex" in Broughton ed. (1987), where a survey of the current literature on narcissistic disorders is included with particular reference to Christopher Lasch and Kohut.

resolution. In fact, the limits of love appear to be equal to the limits of subjectivity: when one loses oneself in love, an erased subjectivity "achieves its point of culmination." ("SN": 11) It is most likely that the emergence of the first crisis: the death of God, has actually exposed a deeper, more permanent crisis where love's ordeal is a denaturalising experience that erodes our ability to represent it coherently. When we speak of love, the "object slips away"; (*Tales*: 267) when we speak of ourselves, we illuminate the transient being of subjects in passage from one state to another.

Clearly, there are more than love stories at stake here. In offering to rework the topographic boundaries of loving speech, Kristeva effects a sense of distance from the body and its abject contents, and from the subject and object's mutual aggressivity. The experience of separation, she argues, is a problem for contemporary life. Separation from a primary care-giver is necessary for love not to fall into permanent abjection and if we fail to achieve separation, we will be unable to become narcissists, subjects of seeming. The current sense of inhabiting empty speech arises because the subtle mechanisms of this experience have broken down. Her suggestion that we need to constitute new imaginaries, new "baroque" kinds of seeming to make up for the failure of conventional structures, insists that this occurs within the provisional space of a loving, transformative relationship initiated by a redemptive third term: the Imaginary Father. Since conventional ideals have foundered, the psychoanalyst will invent a new one. In this sense then, *Tales of Love* approaches the kind of comforting phenomenology rejected in *Revolution in Poetic Language*. There Kristeva had argued that Heidegger's "care" ("cura") was ontological, effecting a band-aid mentality in the face of the subject's anguished confrontation with negativity. To the arrogant and self-confident critic writing in the early seventies, Heidegger's reading of love seemed redolent of a sentimental maternity "cloaked in semantic anthropomorphism and mythic ideology", as she puts it. (*RPL*: 128) The violent metaphors favoured in *Revolution in Poetic Language* however, the product of

an emphatic new sublime, have by the publication of *Tales of Love* received a soothing coating in recognition that a revolution in language fails to take sufficient account of the *passion* of the subject. Perhaps too, the last decades have increasingly tended to produce wounded subjects in need of tangible care which the tendency to valorise a realm of pure theory in *Revolution in Poetic Language* was unable to register. Whatever the reason, and we must in passing also acknowledge again Kristeva's increasingly personal inflection in her critical work from the early seventies, the opening remarks of *Tales of Love* implicitly recognise the need to alleviate human distress, and in that sense are a radical departure from an earlier fascination with the estranging, *disembodied* power of negativity. "No matter how far back my love memories go, I find it difficult to talk about them" (*Tales*: 1) is a statement announcing that if love is elusive, and if phenomenology must eventually discover its own limits within love, nonetheless the narcissistic comforts and gratifications of personal experience, and the factor of subjective experience generally cannot be entirely dispensed with. Love undermines being but fails to destroy its contours.

This last point returns us to the second crisis: the nature of love itself, a state of affairs whose very *structure* presupposes a disturbance of identity, yet one preserved from radical disintegration by a necessary paternal figure. Quite simply, Kristeva's *Tales of Love* is less a recipe for lifting suffering than it is a study of the estranging effects of love on language and philosophy. The "ego affectus est" is a subject mastered by love. The price of this "knowledge" is transformation and loss. Never stationary, the subject is a voyager in transit between one state (body) of love and another. Philosophy's subject, on the other hand, the ego cogito, persists in the conviction that knowledge is the sole prerogative of the consciousness. His speech as we have seen is grounded in a hostile opposition between mind and body. Where did this opposition originate?

It appears impossible to retrieve a history of Western thought where the

relationship between abstraction and matter has *not* been one of antagonism. The pagan Greek's world view for instance, had as its origin the irreconcilable conflict between an older religion of nature and the more youthful one of the Olympic Gods. In the former, organic life was deified. This deification of an aspect of the relation to "nature" brought forth a correlative with equal force which set itself in direct antithesis to the deified *matter*. The religion of the Olympic Gods arose out of a valorisation of the cultural aspect of Greek society. It was the religion of *form*, of measure, of harmony. These two antagonistic aspects became included within the central dialectical representation of form/matter, the cultural centre of gravity for the Greek world.

In different ways Plato and Aristotle presupposed and further refined this relationship between form and matter. We now understand its dialectic as endorsing a dualism between mind and body, where the first term is always in a position of dominance, of superiority. As Socrates remarks to Simmias in the *Phaedrus*, "the worst of all is that if we do get a bit of leisure and turn to philosophy, the body is constantly breaking in upon our studies and disturbing us with noise and confusion, so that it prevents our beholding the truth and in fact we perceive that, if we are ever to know anything absolutely, we must be free from the body and must behold the actual realities with the eyes of the soul alone."⁸⁴

If philosophy has excluded the male body from its conceptualisations in order to reason, Kristeva by contrast locates material static and its subsequent disavowal at the very heart of Platonic discourse. Love founds philosophy, and love (or eros, in this case) refuses to submit to contemplative purity without a struggle. In *Phaedrus*, Plato speaks of the struggle of the loving soul to ascend to the Good in terms of a war between two teams of winged horses, one good, one bad. While the obedient steed out of a sense of shame "refrains from leaping on the beloved", the charioteer struggles to overcome the violent advances of the other

⁸⁴ In Anthony Flew, ed., *Body, Mind, and Death*. (New York: Macmillan, 1964), p. 44

and only succeeds in restraining passionate desire through severe punishment. Knowledge of the ideal, therefore, never frees itself from an intimate association with embodied *male* desire, and when desire is sexual, that knowledge can only be another form of mastery. As Hegel noted in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, "the relation of two self-conscious individuals is such that they prove themselves and each other through a life and death struggle."⁸⁵ One individual seeks to assert his own claims to autonomy by mastering the other; by effacing an alterior identity. Whether we read Hegel's opposition as symptomatic of his own drives to master consciousness and the object of perception or whether, like Jessica Benjamin, we see his point as being that domination "is a substitute for or escape from differentiation, from recognizing another's independent existence",⁸⁶ the master/slave dialectic is a compelling commentary on what Kristeva calls "the male rush toward phallic domination or submission to its brawn" (*Tales*: 62) that is masked by idealism.

Eros as the desire for what is lacking is the phallic ideal exemplified in *Phaedrus*, an ideal which places us "at once in the presence of what must indeed be called the erection of a body, always already seduced, inhabited, and carried away by Power." (*Tales*: 63) If eros finally gives place to the sublime it is only because its desires have been transposed to a passionate encounter with the Other through rhetoric and dialogue. Language absorbs the conflicts of the soul within its own dazzling forms. Nonetheless, philosophy is founded on "manic eros" which may only free itself from the hold of physical passion and attain to the sublime ("idealization") through rigorous contemplation. This conclusion represents a considerable shift for Kristeva, I feel, who has always critiqued idealism and metaphysics, but not in terms of its covert male sexed subject. It is as if there has been a new and deeper recognition that anti-essentialism on its own is an inadequate response in understanding the relation between language,

⁸⁵ Hegel (1977), pp. 113-4.

⁸⁶ "The Decline of the Oedipus Complex", in Broughton ed. (1987), p. 226.

estrangement and woman.

For the discourse of idealism serves to remind us of the equally compelling struggle for recognition between masculine and feminine modes of being. One of the questions posed (rather more implicitly than explicitly on the whole) in *Tales of Love* is what is the relation of woman to philosophy? Inasmuch as philosophy's investments can be said to be both homologous and "homosexual",⁸⁷ where does this place woman and in particular, the woman philosopher?

Whether the other of man and philosophy has been understood as God or the other sex, our thought about the nature of things is profoundly indebted to an opposition of thought and matter, either mediated as "God", or embodied as woman. Within the larger dialectics there has been a further opposition between God as spirit and woman as body. Aristotelian dualism is founded, for instance, on the opposition between male and female, according to Caroline Whitbeck and others. Form, like the male, comprehends the rational and active; matter, standing in the place of the feminine, aligns itself with the passive.⁸⁸ As Aristotle remarked:

We may thus conclude that it is a general law that there should be naturally ruling elements and elements naturally ruled . . . The rule of the free man over the slave is one kind of rule; that of the male over the female another . . . The slave is entirely without the faculty of deliberation; the female indeed possesses it, but in a form which remains inconclusive . . . It is thus clear that while moral goodness is a quality of all the persons mentioned, the fact still remains that temperance - and similarly fortitude and justice - are not, as Socrates held, the same in a woman as they are in a man.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ See p. 62. Also consult Luce Irigaray (1985), and in particular her reading of Plato's "hystera" for a study of the notion of the same.

⁸⁸ Whitbeck, "A Different Reality: Feminist Ontology" in Ann Garry and Marilyn Pearsall eds., *Women, Knowledge, and Reality: Explorations in Feminist Philosophy* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), p. 56. For the male/female opposition in philosophy, see also Elizabeth Spelman, *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988).

⁸⁹ Aristotle's *Politics*, cited in "Why Educate Women?", Florence Howe, *Myths of Co-education: Selected Essays 1964-1983* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), pp. 20-21.

According to these words, woman's lesser rationality did not make her man's slave, but it did nevertheless give her a handicap when it came to the "principle of soul",⁹⁰ and hence to becoming an equal subject (of speech and love).

Hélène Cixous chooses to deconstruct the oppositional couple that underlies dualism by exposing its inherent violence: "And the movement by which each opposition is set up to produce meaning is the movement by which the couple is destroyed. A universal battlefield. Each time a war breaks out. Death is always at work."⁹¹ She advocates writing as a "concert of personalizations called I" in order to destroy the form/matter, mind/body opposition that rules philosophy. Luce Irigaray offers an alternative position in her close reading of Plato's "hystera" that reveals the repressed feminine ground on which the concept of Truth (*aletheia*) is constituted. The Oneness that is Truth preserves what she names a "jealous optics": that is, it demands that the field of the gaze recognise the object of perception as a desirable but pale reflection of the One. By the same token, "the beloved will be loved only insofar as he reflects the divine light, of which *a man is a more faithful mirror than a woman or any other animal*."⁹² For the philosopher to identify too closely with the senses leads to a loss of space and consequently, a loss of the means to reach the divine. It also leads to feminisation. Thus reason, emerging from the first maternal cave, denies its material origins even as it idealises or universalises their form through representation, mimesis, homologation. All figuration, argues Irigaray, is ultimately grounded in a feminine generative matrix which it disavows.

Irigaray explicitly offers a reading strategy that resists the male imaginary and mimics its procedures at the same time as it displaces them. Kristeva's method in *Tales of Love* is somewhat different. More seduced by philosophy, she seems

⁹⁰ Aristotle's *Generation of Animals* Bk. I, quoted by Genevieve Lloyd, "The Man of Reason" in Garry and Pearsall eds. (1989), p. 112.

⁹¹ "Sorties" in Marks and de Courtivron eds. (1981), p. 91.

⁹² Luce Irigaray (1985), p. 324.

anxious to find a place for the female theorist within her own synthetic reconstruction of its material base: that is, within philosophy as amorous, as opposed to erotic rhetoric. To repeat, her subject generally speaking is universal, his speech parcelling out "masculine" and "feminine" through the play of signification. Kristeva believes that if language let itself be transformed by affect (as the new space afforded by love), the violence and mastery implicit in the will to knowledge would be subdued. Universality in discourse would then reconstitute itself as a genuine play of (sexual) differences within and between subjects. Masculine and feminine are thus closer to a notion of positionality than they are to discrete identities, even imaginary ones. Yet in order to be consistent with a concomitant emphasis on woman's different relation to the Phallus (to meaning, power, and discourse), Kristeva's enunciation carries a marked *surplus*, a "discreet trace," which privileges the position of a female intellectual and philosopher whose ambitious exploration of the unknown aims to take her to the boundaries of "the rational project". For she also believes that once language truly learns to be at home with affect, women will no longer have to be the repressed other of speech. Their understanding of the feminine may in fact then make them more acute listeners than men. The utterance of *Tales of Love*, its content, offers a history of the discourses of love in the West. Its enunciation however, offers an implicit feminine commentary on that history.

That is why I cannot entirely agree with John Lechte who argues that in *Tales of Love* the fundamental question is separation, defined as absence or emptiness. While recognising the primary drama of separation undergone by the subject and the need for a new understanding of *space* and its relation to affect and body, I feel there is a further aspect of this drama that Lechte does not discuss, which is the text's emphasis on fusion. As Kristeva comments, the kind of love under discussion is something absolute into which the subject falls and is "without doubt the maximal defence against castration: 'If I love like this, nothing can happen to me; I will neither see you, nor be seen.'" ("SN": 10) As illusory as this

feeling may be, it certainly adds an ambivalent component to the experience of separation. Lechte's reading by contrast appears to represent the kind of separation implied by primary narcissism as a new form of Absolute Ideal. I am just as taken though, by the aspects of narcissistic gratification inherent in a loving fusion, and by the persistent mediation between interiority and exteriority; presence and absence; "flesh" and "language" in the psyche. Do I read Kristeva differently because merging is a more instinctive response for me than separation and loss? Because as a woman my flesh is more "attached", more invested in my discourse? Or is my reading misguided, a narcissistic production that gratifies an imaginary ego? Kristeva's confrontation with the body does suggest that separation from the mother is a complicated drama played out on many levels concurrently whose outcome is never fully resolved. And from time to time, this sense of complexity appears in the text's enunciation as an appeal to a referential object (that is, to "experience"). Take the case where the need for a personal engagement in analysis (and philosophy) is put: "I think when a theoretician speaks about love, he or she is too much involved, and honestly he or she has to take account and tell people why he or she, in what way they are involved and not to block this involvement by a neutral historical discourse . . .".⁹³ Clearly, in this comment what is under discussion is not some privileged relation to femininity, but rather how the kind of fracturing of identity that the state of love produces draws the analyst in and transforms his or her subjectivity. In speaking of love, we experience a modification of being that inevitably undermines neutrality. But in that case whether male or female, the analyst cannot maintain a position that is inherently separate, since love as transference involves both separation *and* merging.

On the other hand, numerous remarks throughout *Tales of Love* lead me to think that its writer, beyond the above strategy of engagement, undoubtedly wishes to retain a sense of feminine *particularity* in her discourse. Indeed, *Tales*

⁹³ "Julia Kristeva in Conversation with Rosalind Coward" in Lisa Appignanesi ed., *Desire*, I.C.A. Documents (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1984), p. 24.

of *Love* may be read as a text that surreptitiously privileges those aspects of experience that have often been apportioned to women: narcissism, self-reference, intimacy (as opposed to autonomy) and a non-erotic form of love. In the pages that follow, it is the relationship of this space of homely "particularity" to the more elaborate discourse of separation and idealisation that I will examine.

4. 6. I. the Imaginary Father

Kristeva tells us that her patients by and large appear to be suffering from a lack of psychic space. This lack which produces numerous painful effects, arises from the subject's failure to establish a sense of his own particularity and to direct it towards a loving Ideal. Idealising distance is a "condition for the very existence of psychic space", (*Tales*: 31) Kristeva informs us. Or as Lechte comments, "love requires a Third Party (Other) whose role is to make possible the identification with another who is like oneself. Consequently, the other (object of love) is impossible unless the Other (Ideal) is also involved."⁹⁴ Where an ideal or idealising capacity is absent or frail, a person becomes ill - without love, but equally unable to receive it. In order to stabilise her patients, relieve them of abjection and offer them a ground on which to elaborate their love, Kristeva introduces the figure of the Imaginary Father.

The Imaginary Father is derived from Freud's "father in individual prehistory" with whom there is a "direct and immediate" form of identification.⁹⁵ In the essay "Identification" in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*,⁹⁶ Freud gives the example of the role model the father plays for his son's loving identification. The father is his ideal in a way that is different from his relation to the first "anaclitic" object he will love sexually, his mother. Identification of a non-sexual kind appeared before object choice for Freud, and as Kristeva remarks,

⁹⁴ Lechte (1990), p. 170.

⁹⁵ Freud, "The Ego and the Id", SE XIX, p. 31.

⁹⁶ James Strachey, trans. (1922), pp. 60-70.

this "father" invites an "enigmatic, non-objectal identification."⁹⁷ This archaic site harbours the first sign of primary repression, since when the little boy begins to identify with his father, he has to learn to deflect his devouring, libidinal urges away from his father and on to an acceptance of the sustaining power of words: a proto-symbolic relationship.

In actual fact, Kristeva interprets Freud's more empirical "Father" who at this stage contains the attributes of both parents,⁹⁸ as a Third Party, a factor that draws the mother's gaze away from the child, and prevents her from claiming the baby as her own Ideal, and thus part of her ego. "He" is, as she puts it, "the Phallus desired by the mother." (*Tales*: 41) That the mother desires something Other than the child is what makes possible separation, absence, and hence the desire to love and receive love. While making use of the paternal metaphor to locate a Third Party, it is clear that Kristeva does not wish it to appear that this instance must inevitably collapse into phenomenology, becoming identified with a referential object: the (real) father. At one point she suggests that such a triangulation may be articulated by "X" and "Y" for instance.⁹⁹ Although this suggestion is quickly discarded, it does indicate the difficulties associated with using familiar (and familial) terms to illustrate something new and potentially estranging. It is even questionable that we can actually divest ourselves of the wealth of associations that we bring to the terms mother and father or man and woman, as I have already pointed out in relation to *Powers of Horror*. Separation prefigures emptiness, but it is an imaginary emptiness - in reality separation takes place in concert with an indwelling of "presence". Thus we read the term "Imaginary Father" as both gratifying our earliest object loves and going beyond them to a

⁹⁷ In the Standard Edition of Freud, this is described as the "most primitive aspect of affective binding to an object (SE XVIII, cited in *Tales*, p. 26); in the translation by Strachey, the relationship of identification is represented as "the earliest expression of an emotional tie with another person." (p. 60)

⁹⁸ Freud, "The Ego and the Id", SE XIX, p. 31, thus: "before a child has arrived at a definite knowledge of the difference between the sexes, the lack of a penis, it does not distinguish in value between its father and its mother."

⁹⁹ "In Conversation", Lisa Appignanesi ed. (1984), p. 23.

space that transcends, even problematises, all forms of object love. Curiously then, while the Other establishes the absent ground which is necessary for all subsequent identifications, its most important role seems to consist in calling the emerging subject out of itself to dwell in its loving presence. Its habitation thus offers space *and* intimacy to the journeying subject.

For the Imaginary Father is one who loves rather than judges. Yet in contrast to the pre-Oedipal incest privileged in *Powers of Horror* and "Polylogue", the figure of the Imaginary Father in *Tales of Love* is non-libidinal. It suggests that the mother-child relationship in itself is too close and too allied to the libido to allow for differentiation. Perhaps this modification is also stressed because underlying the drives towards incest that were glorified in Kristeva's earlier writing lies the Oedipal contest: the struggle of the father against the sons where both were locked in devouring, unproductive rivalry. Kristeva now wishes to redefine this first father not as a seducer but as the originator of Agape, and the precursor of a Law that does not recognise a phallic power struggle. Through agape we are drawn in to a primary identification that is "always already . . . under the sway of language." (*Tales*: 27)

An "always already" identification assumes a mediated relationship to the other constituted by language as dialectics. But Kristeva additionally wants to argue that the appearance of the Imaginary Father occupies a qualitatively different space: one that is "immediate" and *unmediated*. His enigmatic appearance occurs outside of, or on the edge of language. This is *not* the Oedipal space of Law and separation mediated by the Name of the Father. Rather what is being re-drawn here is the subject's relation to space as transcendence or exteriority. In an attempt to distinguish the unique nature of primary separation, Kristeva turns to Hegel, who in his introduction to the *Phenomenology* speaks of the immediate as "The absolute . . . from the outset in and for itself beside us and [who] wants to

be beside us".¹⁰⁰ This Imaginary Other is in actuality not a divine elsewhere, but a space or "fold" which never left us - we are subjects always already inhabited by otherness.¹⁰¹

Hegel had argued that the Absolute is immediately present to us. This recognition is a founding moment for thought, since it confers presence on the subject. But the advent of the Absolute for the subject does not involve a dialectical operation, where the particular is sublated in and through the Universal. Reading Hegel, Heidegger observes that criticism "can no longer consist in an assessment of the mediating capacity of knowledge . . . [which] from the start . . . cannot be a means."¹⁰² Hegel clearly wished to retain some form of appeal to transcendence (Spirit or Mind), but a transcendence that was "immediate and therefore effortless" and thus in one sense, immanent. Such a procedure placed the Absolute beyond the consciousness, but able to be registered by it. In *Revolution in Poetic Language* Kristeva had suggested that while for Hegel this "first mysterious movement of 'immediate certainty'" (RPL: 196) may have been theological, when placed alongside Kristevan semiotics its origin turned out to be yet another instance of the flux of material relations. (RPL: 197) In *Tales of Love* however, the "godsend" that the Absolute is has been recast in terms closer to those of Hegel once again. "We are immediately within parousia", writes Kristeva, "'always-already,' before producing a relationship to it . . .". (Tales: 39) The relation between signified and signifier, particular and universal, subject and object, is, since unmediated, *indeterminate*, or in process.¹⁰³ There is a

¹⁰⁰ I have used Leon Roudiez' translation here in preference to Miller's, which reads "with us, in an for itself, all along, and of its own volition." Hegel (1977), p. 47.

¹⁰¹ Noreen O'Connor expresses the strange sense of meeting what we already knew somewhere else that occurs in dreams and in the analytical relationship as "a new speaking of that which is not anticipated, not already known, but yet is felt to be that which is most familiar." In Fletcher and Benjamin eds. (1990), p. 43.

¹⁰² Martin Heidegger, *Hegel's Concept of Experience* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), pp. 30-31.

¹⁰³ I am indebted here to Cynthia Chase: "The critical force of Freud's allusion to an 'immediate identification' (if not of Hegel's conception of immediacy) is the implication that the signifying function does not in fact take place by means of dialectical mediation or the process of annulling the particular and preserving it 'beyond,' at a higher level, as Lacan describes the emergence of desire through need and demand. Rather, the signifying function would not achieve mediation or

mysterious relation established then, between the flux of matter and the Absolute as loving Ideal that can neither be wholly universalised or dissected into discrete elements.

What this metaphysical inflection indicates is Kristeva's recognition that a hypothetical exterior point folded *within the system* that will sustain the subject without overwhelming him, is the necessary origin and end of loving speech. The Imaginary Father figure *is* the journey that calls the voyager out of herself and into another place. Does this loving Ideal though merely leave us in the end with a restructured idealism? It is possible to read Kristeva in such a light, but for my part, I consider that the strengths of her analysis consist precisely in reconceptualising the relation of the subject (as interiority) to an exterior (transcendence or the Other). When libido is displaced on to the transference itself as structure, it allows the Other to orientate the emerging subject vis à vis the other (object of sexual love). Thus to become a slave to love is, paradoxically, to receive the means to elaborate our own particularity. It also indicates that the hostile stand-off that drives the mind/body, man/woman opposition is tempered, possibly even annulled by a prior identification with an obscure, seductive non-object.

4. 6. II. Narcissus

The Imaginary Father leads me beyond an autoerotic relationship with my mother into narcissism. Narcissus is the central psychic character in *Tales of Love* and it is his tragedy, argues Kristeva, that is ours today. In Ovid,¹⁰⁴ the beautiful youth falls in love with what he takes to be an other, but which turns out to be a reflection of part of himself - his ideal. Incapable of granting interiority to himself and exteriority to an object (Echo), he reduces his own and an-

sublation, since it operates through figural and material dimensions impossible to mediate." See "Desire and Identification in Lacan and Kristeva" in Feldstein and Roof eds. (1989), pp. 78-9. This mode of operation is best represented, by reference to the scheme illustrated in "SN" (1984) that links drives and representations in the form of a "relay" between the abject mother and the Imaginary Father (p. 11).

¹⁰⁴ *Metamorphoses*, trans. A.D. Melville (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 61-6.

other's subjectivity to ghostly refractions. Sound and image shimmer and captivate the "watery prowler" but fail to lead him to a true, loving recognition of difference. When Narcissus perceives the object of his love to be in reality his *image*, he dies, unable to entertain the possibility that absence or loss of what one holds most dear is the prerequisite for joining in love with another. Interpreting the myth, Kristeva argues that subjectivity is grounded in love, and that confirmation of one's independence provides the necessary support for a subject to enter language, and to construct sustaining relationships. When primary care is too close and too intense, there is either a shutting down of psychic development, or an extreme vulnerability to outside stimuli. In either case, the individual who experiences this kind of disturbance is in no position to elaborate a psychic space - "home" and his "protective [maternal] wrapping" enclose him too jealously. As Jessica Benjamin expresses it,

at some point in the earliest struggle for recognition, the mother must actually remove herself from the child's omnipotent sense of control. She must establish her existence as another subject, as a person, so that the child, too, can have a sense of selfhood. If the mother is not herself able to tolerate this degree of differentiation from her child, to inflict this pain upon her or him, or if she is able to do so only by asserting her own total control over the child, the child's narcissism will either be unrealistically inflated or wounded.¹⁰⁵

Of course the trauma of narcissism and separation wound us all: leaving home is a never ending process and to a greater or lesser extent, we each suffer from an experience of separation where home and its comforts are either too close or too far away. But the psychotic person like Narcissus, while desiring otherness, cannot accept it. And also like Narcissus, what returns to his gaze as a scintillating exterior form is nothing but a hallucination: the product of imperfectly integrated drives. Because the drives have not been deflected away from autoeroticism, the subject cannot accept a real object to substitute for the hallucinated one.

¹⁰⁵ Benjamin, in Broughton ed. (1987), p. 227.

Thus the ideal never becomes an object, just as Narcissus was for his mother the phallic ideal (part of her "body", her desire), and not a separate object, or a separate subjectivity over and against her own. Despite the popular notion then that Narcissus was preoccupied with his own love, we should rather recognise that the myth reflects a *failure* of self-love. Narcissus on the contrary, did not go far enough along the path of subjectivity.¹⁰⁶

To recapitulate, primary narcissism is a structure prior to the Oedipus complex where the unstable narcissistic subject is caught up in two relations: firstly the attraction to the figure of primary identification which Freud had called the father of individual prehistory, and secondly the peculiar kind of seesawing from attraction to repulsion in relation to the archaic mother figure. In *Powers of Horror*, abjection is a precondition of narcissism. Hatred receives a similar emphasis in *Tales of Love*, where it is seen as the underside of love. Freud had shown in "Instincts and their Vicissitudes" that the ego drives of the narcissistic libido also include death drives:

Hate, as a relation to objects, is older than love. It derives from the narcissistic ego's primordial repudiation of the external world with its outpouring of stimuli . . . it always remains in an intimate relation with the self-preservative instincts; so that sexual and ego-instincts can readily develop an antithesis which repeats that of love and hate.¹⁰⁷

Hatred occurs when psychic space fails. Taken to extremes, it may result in self-destruction, for as Kristeva remarks: "Narcissus in love hides the suicidal narcissus; the most urgent of all drives is death drive. Left to itself, without the assistance of projection upon the other, the Ego takes itself for a preferential target of aggression and murder." (*Tales*: 124)

Narcissism according to Freud then, is the product of a new psychic action supplementing autoeroticism; a turning away towards the "imaginary father of one's

¹⁰⁶ John Lechte also makes this observation. See Lechte (1990), pp. 171-2.

¹⁰⁷ *Papers on Metapsychology*, SE XIV, p. 139.

pre-history".¹⁰⁸ It can be seen as a fragile meniscus-like screen put up during the process that moves the not-yet ego to differentiate itself from the not-yet object. Kristeva suggests that paradoxically, emptiness inhabits the most intimate spaces of the human psyche. Narcissism can thus be read as the Lacanian "béance" or gap of the mirror stage which is also represented by the bar between signifier and signified, indicating that the plenitude of the first object, the mother, is forever lost. If this emptiness is not maintained, the psyche will be overwhelmed by a sense of chaos, the watery surface of Narcissus' world dissolving its subject in a scintillating play of forms and appearances.

Although the story of Narcissus has a cautionary aspect in one form or another, it serves for Kristeva additionally and contrarily, I feel, as the founding moment of intellectual activity and literature. Through metaphor, the wounded Narcissan subject transfers his longing to literature - signs replete with a multitude of possibility enable him to lace together a glittering, temporary habitation. The ultimate form of estrangement therefore is language and the limpidity of syntax, submersing the derelict subject in its shifting structures and obscuring his sense of loss by proffering a jubilant identification with signs. Writing by the subject of love thus proves to be the active means whereby the narcissistic exile loses himself and finds another place. And since it deals with images and reflections, Narcissus' action also founds specularity. His unique kind of psychic space is auto-referential, taking form itself for its object. As Kristeva recognises, because he fails to see the world of imagination and seeming for what they are - merely fantasy; because he is unable to distinguish between internality and exterior perception and master his perceptions through intellectual reflection, he dies. (*Tales*: 116) Nevertheless, to a degree any creative act involves a kind of Narcissan psychosis that falls in love with its own image. The literary experience jams separation's mechanism, destabilising the "same through its identification with the Other." (*Tales*: 279) If *Tales of Love* is concerned with providing a

¹⁰⁸ SE XIV, p. 77.

necessary psychic space through separation, I am intrigued to discover that what fascinate Kristeva throughout this text are those case-histories in the West where separation has frequently been a *problem*. Take the example of Bataille, for instance, whose meditation on incest confuses God, the sun, and his mother's sex. Or Stendahl and Don Juan, whose fear of a phallic, devouring mother far exceeded their amorous desire. These are figures who represent a precarious, even a failed narcissism. The artist *plays* with words until he does not know where inside and outside, self and other, discourse and the "real" begin and end. Absence and differentiation therefore, never erase an autoerotic (abject) element that continues to find shelter for itself within literature.

A similar but less explicit ambiguity characterises the origins of philosophy. The narcissan "error" is germane to the activity of speculative thought:

Beginning with Plotinus at least . . . theoretical thought has forgotten that it rumbled along over emptiness before lovingly springing toward the solar source of representation, the light that enables us to see and with which we aspire to become equal, idealization following upon idealization, perfecting upon perfecting: *In lumine tuo videbimus lumen*. (*Tales*: 42)

According to this perspective, idealisation establishes itself as an image that screens *absence* and illusion, not presence. This single economic manoeuvre allows Kristeva to deconstruct the very ground of metaphysics, for if all intellectual perception is laid down over such watery shifting terrain, our speculative constructions can be but shimmering mirages. "Truth" is yet a journey towards the light, but its *origins* no less than its *methods* arise out of a passionate affair with appearances. We have substituted our own narcissistic image for the "emptiness, dark, blanks and broken forms" that Kristeva would argue reality is. From the very beginning, philosophy has ignored the intimate connection between the worlds of metaphor (seeming) and the ideal ("truth"). Through the search for truth, erotic desire aroused by the image of the beautiful boy is transformed into passion for an ideal: longing for the Good.

Even in Plato though, the resulting beatific vision never managed to rise above a contest for mastery between two identities. Agape love is distinct from the manic eros we read of in Plato, insists Kristeva, because it privileges a *transformative* relationship that directs narcissism towards idealisation. Through transference, the psychotic's "I am the phallus", and the Oedipal "I have the phallus" give place to the desire to "be like" a form or ideal - to be within love, in other words. It makes little sense, therefore, to see the effects of transference love as producing autonomous, fully differentiated subjects. Amorous fusion within the Other gratifies the needs of the ideal ego as much as it provides a way out of abjection.

4. 6. III. ego ideal and ideal ego

Love takes place as an act of enunciation "where the object slips away" (*Tales*: 267) and where "home" recedes between the two states of narcissism and idealisation. But because today we can neither assuage the demands of our *ideal ego* nor direct them towards an *ego ideal* we experience suffering. Because the old distinctions between inside and outside, "me" and "you", home and place have disintegrated, we cannot constitute ourselves as subjects. Needless to say, while I have argued that moments of ambivalence between conceptual entities are indeed privileged by Kristeva, it is also abundantly clear that where *all* is ambiguity, and where psychic space is radically lacking, abjection is the inevitable result. The relation established between ego ideal and ideal ego is symptomatic of an interesting turn to extol, against Lacan, the virtues of non-erotic, agape love - which, incidentally, a woman may know more about - if we are to believe Kristeva. That at least is what I read as the challenge being extended to philosophy here.

The very first ego ideal, the site for what Freud later named the superego¹⁰⁹ (a site of proscriptions and ideals), lies in a transformation of early narcissism and the

¹⁰⁹ In "The Ego and the Id", the term "superego" is first coined and likened to the earlier discussed ego ideal. See pp. 28-39, and the explanatory notes on pp. 7-10 by James Strachey.

redirection of its energies towards another entity or structure within the self: "man has here again shown himself incapable of giving up a satisfaction he once enjoyed. He is not willing to forgo the narcissistic perfection of his childhood . . . he seeks to recover it in the new form of an ego ideal. What he projects before him as his ideal is the substitute for the lost narcissism of his childhood in which he was his own ideal."¹¹⁰ In Freud's *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, love, hypnosis, and group identification all provide instances where the subject substitutes another person or persons for his ego ideal. By comparison, the ideal ego comes to have a different resonance. An "ideal of narcissistic omnipotence constructed on the model of infantile narcissism",¹¹¹ the term *Idealich* is suggested by Freud in "On Narcissism" and "The Ego and the Id", although he does not yet clearly distinguish between this term and that of the ego ideal. The difference between the new form of the ego ideal and the "narcissistic ego libido" of the ideal ego receives further clarification when in *Group Psychology* the former is related to the "father one would want to *be*", and the second, to the figure one would want to *have*. According to Kristeva, the former position occupied by the ego ideal ("being") may contain the seeds of a loving identification that is ultimately superior to an erotic desire ("having" or possession,) which satisfies the needs of the ideal ego.

Other theorists have associated the omnipotence of narcissism with a primary relation to the mother more emphatically.¹¹² Lacan locates the ideal ego in the mirror-stage of the imaginary, and it unquestionably has a tendency by many psychoanalysts to be viewed as more regressive than the function performed by the ego ideal. However, even the activity of idealisation which initiates the two formations involves narcissism: "when we are in love a considerable amount of narcissistic libido overflows on to the object."¹¹³ Idealisation tends to aggrandise

¹¹⁰ "On Narcissism", p. 94.

¹¹¹ See Laplanche and Pontalis (1973), p. 201.

¹¹² See Laplanche and Pontalis (1973), pp. 145, 201-2.

¹¹³ Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1922), p. 74.

the object. In talking about the mating patterns of male and female sticklebacks, Lacan describes this "closed world of two" as an intersection of object libido and narcissistic libido: "Love is a phenomenon which takes place on the imaginary level, and which produces a veritable subduction of the symbolic, a sort of annihilation, of perturbation of the function of the ego-ideal."¹¹⁴ In love, this ego ideal configuration (the other who is not my ego) comes to be placed on the plane of imaginary narcissism and identified with the ideal ego, which makes love resemble madness: "That's what love is. It's one's own ego that one loves in love, one's own ego made real on the imaginary level."¹¹⁵ If separation and absence are primary conditions for loving identification, all the same, they are never free from an association with narcissistic *fusion*: a delightful (or alarming) sense of sinking, of being overwhelmed by the presence of another who can hardly be distinguished from oneself. In love we leave home only to return by another route.

Agreeing that falling in love gratifies narcissism, Kristeva would however, stress the *non-erotic* ground of love. Her critique of Plato (and by extension, the wider discourse of philosophy) had lead her to suggest that a violent, erotic urge to mastery inhabited thought. Unlike Luce Irigaray who calls for women to elaborate a new erotics of the divine through a language that would embody woman's "flesh and blood",¹¹⁶ Kristeva's relation to the "divine" - an affective identification with the Imaginary Father - is founded on *agape*, on a relationship that does not see the other as a (sexual) object to be possessed or devoured. The transference to the Imaginary Father makes us *strangers* in love where the path to the ideal passes through and sustains narcissism and the body, but does not make a permanent home there. Kristeva finds the mechanism to establish a *distance* from the more assimilating aspects of narcissism in a new perspective on

¹¹⁴ *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book I, Freud's Papers on Technique 1953-54.* Jacques-Alain Miller ed., trans. John Forrester (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 142.

¹¹⁵ Miller ed. (1988), p. 138.

¹¹⁶ Whitford (1991), p. 48.

the work of the drives. Considering this shift in representation where drives read as destructive in *Revolution in Poetic Language* are now seen as requiring an attachment to a transforming ideal, the manner in which they are divested of libido is of great interest.

Along with incorporating a part-object of desire (the mother's breast), *Tales of Love* tells us we also incorporate a non-object, a model through the mother's orientation to an other. The oral stage gratifies needs as well as providing the first intimation of loving space. Thus the space of identification [*Einfühlung*] enables orality to be read by the child as having a prototypical form or pattern - it invests oral gratification with the potential for eventual transformation into a site for receiving the speech ("food") of the Other. So "incorporating and introjecting orality's function is the essential substratum of what constitutes man's being, namely, *language*." (*Tales*: 26) Such an emphasis on a metaphorical non-object distinguishes Kristeva's reading of the nature of the love relationship from Lacan's, who by contrast reads the inauguration of the *symbolic* as establishing the ego ideal, identification and desire.¹¹⁷ Kristeva's "One", the Imaginary Father, is located *prior* to the mirror stage where my primitive desire to devour has been redirected through a metaphorical register on to a psychic level: "In being able to receive the other's words, to assimilate, repeat, and reproduce them, I become like him: One. A subject of enunciation. Through psychic osmosis/identification. Through love." (*Tales*: 26) Through metaphorical identification, drives have been linked to signifying ideals. We can see then that sublimation (where object libido is displaced on to a non-sexual aim) is at work at the earliest stages of narcissism. At this stage the ego ideal looks to be the superior locus for renewal and individuation within the psyche. But what is to prevent the ego ideal which Lacan links with sublimation and the Law (the symbolic) from becoming just as overbearing as the narcissistic demand for immediate gratification, driving the subject with an impossible set of goals

¹¹⁷ *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, Miller ed. (1991), p. 256. Wilden has translated the *einzigster Zug* ("unary feature") as "single stroke" in this passage on love and identification.

and proscriptions? Besides, isn't all our idealising on love merely the rehearsal of an earlier narcissism? How can ego ideal and ideal ego ever be any more than an antagonistic couple? Finally, what is there about "being in love" that could restrain the aggressive, incorporating path of the drives?

These questions lie behind Kristeva's attempt to rearticulate a third term that will reconstruct the ego ideal so that it satisfies the needs of narcissism and the body as well as redirecting that narcissism on to signifying its relation to the Ideal, the Other. Such a term would have to avoid simply reproducing the struggle for power and mastery that Hegel believed to be fundamental to creative existence. Thus when we begin to place all-consuming narcissism and a demanding ideal in relationship, what emerges in the human psyche is "love-sickness", where the subject does not yet know how to be, because he defines his existence as "'I' is because *I love*". (*Tales*: 169) "*To love* comes in here in the place of *to be* and *as*: copula and comparison, existence and image, truth and deception. A drifting together of the symbolic, the real, and the imaginary." (*Tales*: 162) "To be" and "to have" need to be mediated by a missing third term (that of the imaginary): to seem, or to be like. We know that the Oedipus complex is characterised by having the phallus ("Who has it?"), and that the pre-Oedipal stage of primary narcissism defines itself in terms of being the phallus ("Who is it?") (*Tales*: 47) "Being like" by comparison, may well be a condition that challenges the fixity of both possession *and* narcissism, particularity *and* fusion, ego ideal *and* ideal ego, since it introduces the desire for "unbeing" into identification through defining love as a non-objectal, non-verifiable (imaginary) transference. The drives are cathected on to a form or metaphor. Being in its most primitive form for Kristeva is being as form, act or metaphor: "being like", in other words. In this sense, neither Freud nor Lacan's categories ("the father one would want to be"; "the father one would want to have") appear capable of articulating the *unhomeliness* that love is.

For it is only when love is regarded as a state of *unbeing* that the permanent sense of mystery we have of each other when we love may be preserved. Neither becomes an object to be mastered or known by the other since love restores an enigmatic form of appearance to its subjects and their speech. While we are never fully at home with ourselves or each other, transference love effects a rearrangement of psychic and discursive space to provide a temporary resting place from which we depart once more, refreshed and transformed. Nevertheless such a deconstruction of being does not valorise separation. Who/m do I love when I am (in) love? Myself, or another? Metaphor, like being in love, "oscillates between a full and an empty sense."¹¹⁸ Its fusion of semic fields mimes, even as it calls into being, amorous fusion. True agape is a confused struggle between flesh and spirit, just as Bernard of Clairvaux's battles with the flesh still depended for their spiritual intensity on the flesh's existence, and therefore on the continual passage between ideal ego and ego ideal. Love like abjection is an ambivalent state, yet without its permanent dejection. Its uncertainties are also what make it "feminine".

I find a number of intriguing differences in the positions taken by Lacan and Kristeva on love. For both theorists, identification propels the subject to take up a place in relation to the signifier of the Other. (*Tales*: 37) Whereas Lacan puts the agent responsible for identification of the ego ideal in the metonymic realm of desire with its "phantasmatic *narrative*" (*Tales*: 30) and hence in submission to the symbolic and the object *a* (in essence the part-object), for Kristeva, the object of identification lies not only prior to the mirror stage, but is also in process, thereby avoiding a situation where idealisation under the Phallus can become tyrannical. This manifests itself in the analytical situation where the analyst is still seen as a desiring subject, yet as one who also stands in the place of a "nondesiring but loving father [who] reconciles the ideal Ego with the Ego Ideal". (*Tales*: 30) And it is the analyst's "temporary" but "effective mergings" which

¹¹⁸ Lisa Appignanesi ed. (1984), p. 20.

precipitate the splitting that will establish the psyche in permanent relation to an other. (*Tales*: 31) Thus Kristeva retains Lacan's "spaltung", but redefines the object as one of transference and love rather than desire and fantasy. Desire as we know privileges lack, whereas affect, which comes to the fore in any consideration of the non-object, "while acknowledging the latter [lack, absence], gives greater importance to the movement toward the other and to mutual *attraction*." (*Tales*: 155) That is, the impetus to merge *without aggressive capture of one by the other* rather than separation as such is of primary importance in the constitution of a loving subject.

Kristeva's critique is once again directed at "the male rush toward phallic domination". While the analyst is still desired, she is also a site that draws and attracts metaphoricity. Here, the subject not only desires the other, he *identifies* with the Other (the subject's ego ideal); he *belongs* to it.¹¹⁹ Such a sense of belonging, however transitory, distinguishes Kristeva's "feminine" reading of love as founded upon a drive that in the first instance relinquishes sexual conquest in order to gratify a new kind of intimacy, from Lacan's. *Tales of Love* is not arguing that women are better able to love than men or that women have not been loved as they should. What is being suggested here, I think, is that women have superior rhetorical force as philosophers if, and only if, they refuse to privilege an *erotic* relation to the body. That is, if they read language as a love affair with metaphors rather than objects and bodies. What is required is a *feminine* conflation of narcissism (ideal ego) and idealisation (ego ideal), a transference relation to the Imaginary Father whose impetus defuses the body's libido into words embodied with affect that *women's* predisposition towards narcissism enables them to re-present. The topography of love crosses masculine and feminine bodies seemingly indifferently, but in the process leaves behind an obscure, imaginary thickening which the female voyager may well be better

¹¹⁹ "The subject exists because it belongs to the Other, and it is in proceeding from that symbolic belonging that causes him to be subject to love and death that he will be able to set up for himself imaginary objects of desire." (*Tales*, p. 36) Through identification, the subject is transferred to the place of the Other.

placed to "see".

4. 6. IV. women and feminism

There are times when in reading Kristeva I am led to suspect that almost every remark can be strategically reinterpreted as an implicit commentary on the difficulty, yet the imperative, of establishing a distinctly different place in language for the woman who is an intellectual. The difficulties: how is it possible to designate this place without falling into essentialism (without, that is, gratifying the ego by constructing a home that is too comforting and secure)? And the imperative: given that women and men take up different positions in relation to the Phallus, a difference that is not entirely obliterated through the play of signification, part of any intellectual project must surely be to find an effective way to elaborate that difference.

In his work on identification Freud had separated object love from identification with an ideal. In the early stages of the Oedipus complex, the little boy wishes to be like his father, and not long afterwards, to take his mother as his first love object. Maternal care provided a nurturing loving matrix; paternal identification eventually led to an internalisation of the father's rules and to autonomy. As Jessica Benjamin notes, "identification with the mother, being feminine like her, is now experienced as dangerous regression and dedifferentiation."¹²⁰ From this place of separateness, the son would reach out in later life often to select an anaclitic love object: that is, someone whose love would reduplicate the first care he received from his mother. According to this model whereby independence is achieved through differentiating oneself from the mother, *maternal* subjectivity has to be refused. Freud's reading of Oedipus did not allow for women, especially mothers, to be regarded as independent subjects. Again, as Benjamin writes, "object love without identification does turn the mother into an object - she is

¹²⁰ Benjamin in Broughton ed. (1987), p. 220.

only different, The Other."¹²¹

In opposition to Freud, Kristeva's texts appear to suggest that a fixed kind of separation and autonomy are impossible ideals - the maternal "semiotic" inhabits subjectivity, undermining self-certainty and singular meaning with a destabilising feminine component. While her work on motherhood in the seventies had been hostile to the notion of female subjectivity and represented maternity as a locus of generation rather than as a signifier for a subject, she had found other ways to privilege the experience of motherhood, and in addition, at least up until *Powers of Horror*, had represented the mother as an agent of love. In short, identification with the law and object love were assumed to be two separate but interdependent functions inhabiting paternal and maternal axes respectively, and, furthermore, where the latter maintained an ambivalent kind of privilege.

What we see emerging in *Tales of Love* is somewhat different. If in earlier work the pre-Oedipal relationship had been regarded as affording the joys of blissful maternal fusion (despite its considerable risks) prior to the demand for active differentiation signalled by the symbolic, *Tales of Love* seems to indicate that a more acute form of separation is necessary long before the Oedipus complex. It is as if the care which a mother provides her child in the early years is more than insufficient to affirm subjectivity; it actually impedes it. Introducing the figure of the Imaginary Father, even if hypothetical, implies that now both identification *and* love require a third term outside of the mother/child dyad, and that this third term should appear very early on the scene. Whereas Freud had never entirely discounted the reality of maternal love, Kristeva here seems to wrest even this function away from the mother, leaving her merely as a stifling, wordless presence (an "extra"?) who surrounds the child with a "protective wrapping over skin and sphincters".¹²² (*Tales*: 34) Although the Imaginary Father is not an

¹²¹ Benjamin in Broughton ed. (1987), p. 230.

¹²² Kristeva argues that Freud had dissassociated not just idealisation, but also love from the mother/child relationship (p. 34). To an extent, this is correct. Freud does distinguish between the

object in the same sense as the mother but a model, form or metaphor, nevertheless he does provide the basis for a nourishing unification: a becoming one through love, which is a description that Kaja Silverman notes, would be just as applicable to Kristeva's earlier figure of the maternal chora.¹²³ In fact, Silverman goes on to observe that *Tales of Love* so thoroughly erases the maternal that even the child's first vocalisations are primarily directed not at the mother, but *through* the mother to the father.

In a fascinating discussion of Kristeva's readings on motherhood, Silverman draws the conclusion that Kristeva's ambivalence towards the maternal reflects a deep psychic ambivalence. Disavowal of maternity's ultimate consciousness masks in reality a disavowal of homosexuality, which Silverman contends is the repressed of Kristeva's discourse.¹²⁴ She terms this doubling "a defensive mechanism, a way of safeguarding herself against the libidinal hold the mother exercises over much of her earlier writing . . . [and in fact] there is a direct relation between the complexity of the paternal fortification system and the intensity of the desire it gainsays."¹²⁵ The more the mother is walled in, the more she is desired; the more desirable she becomes, the more she needs to be silenced. Silverman's critique proceeds to establish the case for a negative Oedipus complex, where girls (and boys) fall in love with the parent of the same sex in full light of day, as it were, and therefore it is the Oedipal mother, she argues, and not

"true [sexual] object-cathexis" the boy develops towards his mother, and the "typical [idealising] identification towards his father." (*Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, pp. 60-61.) However, I do not think he is as dogmatic about this as Kristeva infers and more importantly, he says nothing here about the *mother's* love for her child. Just because her active loving is absent from Freud's discourse does not mean to say that it does not exist, the assumption that Kristeva makes.

¹²³ Silverman (1988), p. 117.

¹²⁴ Judith Butler is equally critical of Kristeva's position on homosexuality. She takes Kristeva to task for her constant representation of female homosexuality as the "psychotic alternative to the acceptance of paternally sanctioned laws . . . [her] tactical dismissal and reduction of lesbian experience performed in the name of the law positions Kristeva within the orbit of paternal-heterosexual privilege." See Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 87. To an extent, Butler's critique suffers from an assumption that everytime Kristeva uses the word "homosexuality", she means lesbianism. In the work on motherhood however, the expression is often used to indicate the close relationship that may exist between mothers and daughters, for instance.

¹²⁵ Silverman (1988), p. 119.

the romantic fantasy of the pre-Oedipal mother who is at the base of Kristeva's reflections on maternity.

While I applaud Silverman's analysis of the self-implication of much of Kristeva's writing, I feel very cautious about attributing its repressed content to a homosexual desire for the mother. I am more inclined to view the apparent paradoxical rendition of maternity as the product of an assimilation of the classic metaphysical but also hysterical split between mind and body which then produces the aporia of the female intellectual. As Jacqueline Rose comments on the ambivalent position of adopting a masculine voice: "For if we have come to acknowledge that writing may involve for women an enforced male identification, condition of entry for women into a tradition which has only partially allowed them a place, we have perhaps asked ourselves less what type of strange, perverse, semi-licensed pleasures such an identification might release."¹²⁶ The woman who has introjected a paradigm that discounts feminine subjectivity as anything other than an anomaly is inevitably drawn to either suppress her difference or to elaborate it *seemingly* through the disjunctive terms of that paradigm, a position which Kristeva's writing practice follows from the late seventies onwards.

What this paradigm tends to effect in discourse is the conjunction of two narratives. The first, as Lechte expresses it, is a narrative where the bar of idealisation has been set too high,¹²⁷ where discourse courts melancholy and death, and where it rigorously purges itself of materiality: "erotic, manic, or idealistic [wo]man does not touch the mother." (*Tales*: 79) The second layering takes place around a feminine identification with the mother. I can find no other explanation, for instance, for the position of the critic vis à vis the mother in "The Novel as Polylogue". The daughter approves of the mother's incarceration for sado-

¹²⁶ Rose (1991), p. 117

¹²⁷ Lechte (1990), p. 169.

masochistic reasons, not for homosexual pleasure. From the point of view of a heterosexual woman, the mother is both the rival who stands in the way, and the person whom one sees acting out one's own fantasies as desirable object. As John Berger reminds us, when women watch they divide themselves in two: the one who (over)looks, and the one who is looked at.¹²⁸ The two positions: active, hostile, aggressive on one hand; and submissive on the other, are interdependent aspects of femininity to be introjected. Like the hysteric, we desire to be desired by the other, and we simultaneously put ourselves in the masculine position to desire the "other" woman. We do not need to be reminded that this doubletake for women is itself the product of an intellectual and cultural system where desire is coded "masculine" and where the feminine does not actively return the gaze to her male counterpart. Instead, the gaze divides her own body (and discourse) in two. Together with men, we silence the rival other (woman); all the while identifying with her desirable object status.

It seems to me that the reason for the split in Kristeva's reading of maternity is more likely to lie in the above explanation than in an unconscious homosexuality. Moreover, the position is further complicated as in *Powers of Horror* when the mother is seen to be a monstrous, engulfing entity. As Silverman has noted, Kristeva undoubtedly seems to be fascinated yet repulsed by this facet of maternity. But rather than invest her writing with unexpressed homosexual longing as Silverman does, I feel happier arguing that the fear of fusion is more likely to arise out of an initial gender polarity that retroactively assigns the mother to the place of narcissistic oneness and undifferentiation. Such a position is exaggerated by the separation of maternal care from paternal identification that occurs in *Tales of Love*. In fact, such a split if unmodified by any other factor can only enhance the separating of (female) sexuality on one hand from (male) idealisation and intellectual activity on the other. For as Freud noted, men are particularly prone to loving one woman with "asexual admiration" and another

¹²⁸ *Ways of Seeing* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin, 1972).

with sexual passion, but moral contempt.¹²⁹ Here we see revealed the mind/body split in all its perniciousness.

At this most obvious level, Kristeva's discourse has internalised a "male" anxiety about the female body and a "male" longing for a realm of amatory and spiritual ideals where feminine sexuality is excluded. But to leave our analysis here would be to radically underread once more. Firstly, Kristeva correctly isolates a fundamental difficulty in achieving subjectivity irrespective of gender; a difficulty that seems to be more acute today than ever before. Even worse, separation is more difficult for women than men: "the dramas of individuation demand of her such a violent rejection of the mother, and by the mother, that in the hatred of the loved object a woman immediately finds herself in a known and intolerable country." (*Tales*: 373) Might not the hostility we see revealed in her writing towards maternal identity be a reflection of the difficulty any woman has in separating from her mother, and the life-long ambivalence she often feels for her? Separation from the maternal home is what enables us to construct our own ego ideals in relation to an Other; we cannot recognise self-reflection as such until we have ceased to be ideals for our mothers (or fathers).

When Kristeva sets up the terminology for what she regards as a necessary triangulation, it is perhaps unfortunate that the "third" should be a loving "Father", but also a reflection of the fact that mothers still maintain much greater investments in primary care and bonding. The father in this sense is both form and something more empirical: a parent to whom is addressed a discourse of love that will situate the child in a place not too far away from home, but not too close either. Kristeva's attitude to women in the text is predicated less on an oscillation between hostility and fascination than a recognition that if we are to avoid the condition of perpetual prematurity, in order to become subjects of speech and love, in order to speak about love, we need to leave home.

¹²⁹ "Contributions to the Psychology of Love" (1911), in Grosz (1990), p. 129.

Again though, it is the nature of this "leaving home" that is in question. Separation is not the unproblematic experience we anticipate because it comprehends both intimacy *and* absence; oneness *and* alterity. It is surely not the radical separation from the body that Platonic discourse struggles to achieve. What I hear equally clearly when I read Kristeva is another voice that knowingly privileges femininity or, more precisely, *a feminine relation to the theoretical object*, despite appearances to the contrary. I have the impression that the female analyst may be better placed to play the role of a loving Other to her patients precisely because of her recognition of the intensity of maternal hatred. Conversely her possibly greater narcissistic attachments to an autoerotic space may make her more receptive to the narcissistic investments of loving speech, as well as more determined to sublimate that narcissism through transference to an Ideal. The register in which Kristeva has chosen to write demands a high degree of sublimation or abstraction, so the challenge becomes one of finding an inflexional mode through which to express this contrary voice: a voice, moreover, which must somehow take the question of woman and love "beyond the looking glass" even as it will continue to inhabit the whole range of associations that the looking glass brings to mind.

Tales of Love spends very little time ostensibly discussing women. The history of amatory discourse in the west runs from Plato through Shakespeare and the troubadours to Bataille with only a handful of female names: Diotima, Metis, the Shulamite, the Virgin Mary, Juliet, and Jeanne Guyon. Metis is described as "a wily agent of the symbolic within the maternal continent . . ."; (*Tales*: 73) Jeanne Guyon's silence is linked to archaic narcissism; (*Tales*: 307) androgynes, like lesbians, refuse to recognise difference, fusing heaven and earth together. (*Tales*: 70) Only the virginal Diotima and the Shulamite woman are held up as examples worthy of emulation and identification. The shepherd and his love in the Song of Songs are the first two autonomous loving subjects in the history of the West,

according to Kristeva. Subject and addressee of the utterance of love, they are never united, but always separated by a distance: now pursuing, now in flight, it is the other's absence that they desire. The Shulamite woman is thus "the first woman to be sovereign [and subject] before her loved one." (*Tales*: 99) The priestess Diotima in Plato's *Symposium* by contrast, is rather like the Virgin because she presents love as both desexualised and idealised.¹³⁰ (*Tales*: 72) She has a uniquely feminine attitude to philosophy because her love is based not on immediate fleshly gratifications, but on "the production of . . . works aiming for immortality." (*Tales*: 72) Diotima's vision of sublime beauty is passed on to the male philosopher, but not before Kristeva has insisted that the feminine desire for procreation, sublimated in the quest for knowledge and beauty, is the privileged receptacle for a particularly jubilant vision of philosophy's object: "Is the amorous philosopher a disciple of a visionary daughter? The idealist is the daughter of the dazzling, invisible father." (*Tales*: 75) A woman is here given the privileged role of intermediary between ideal and eros, where eros is read on the side of the masculine, not the feminine. The cost of this role is undoubtedly a loss of sexuality for Diotima, but she has established nonetheless a unique relationship to knowledge. Kristeva could well have Diotima (or the female philosopher) in mind when she refers to Plato's figure of the "daemon": "This yearning for fusion with the supreme Good, a yearning at the same time for immortality, this desire for that which is lacking and sends its emanations through the body of the young man is considered an *intermediary*. Plato calls it a 'daemon,' by which he means the messenger, the go-between, the medium of synthesis between two separate domains." (*Tales*: 63) Ostensibly a commentary on the nature of the search for the Good, we can read the desire which animates the young man as akin to the way Kristeva perceives desire operating in the woman who philosophises. She is a privileged figure who mediates between semiotic and symbolic modalities, drawing on the multiple range of subject posi-

¹³⁰ She is reminiscent of those women in Freud's paper on narcissism who before "puberty feel masculine and develop some way along masculine lines; after this trend has been cut short on their reaching female maturity, they still retain the capacity of longing for a masculine ideal - an ideal which is in fact a survival of the boyish nature they once possessed." "On Narcissism", p. 90.

tions (aggressive, restorative, penetratingly analytic, coolly remote, narcissistic, passionate) to articulate the multiple reflections cast by her theoretical object: an object for which she has a more than passing affection!

To suggest as does Silverman, that language acquisition is "now completely under paternal jurisdiction" and that the semiotic "seems to have fallen by the way-side"¹³¹ is to ignore the feminisation of philosophy and language that *Tales of Love* declares. Kristeva is quick to criticise the phallic master/slave struggle that eventuates under any regime of "paternal jurisdiction": that is, wherever a discourse on idealism or metaphysics disavows its investments in the material (and for Kristeva, the material represents the articulation of the drives). This is why the emphasis on gratifying both ideal ego and ego ideal is so compelling because it represents the perpetual oscillation between narcissism and identification (sublimation, in this example) that identity (and *reading*) is. Foregrounding the notion of a loving father or reinstating the paternal metaphor is the most obvious narrative in *Tales of Love* and fundamental to its thesis, but surely not the only narrative. Kristeva may not valorise woman as phenomenal identity in this text, yet we can hardly attribute the force of the following suggestion to a theorist who turns a blind eye to her *own* feminine investments:

It is far from certain that woman be more narcissistic than man, as Freud maintained. But for a woman to be able to redirect the insatiable craving for a fine distinctive image toward her inner bosom or, in more psychological terms, her inner solitude, in the exquisite pain of contemplation, daydreaming, or even hallucination - that amounts to a true resolution of narcissism that is not at all erotic (in the Greek sense of the word) but is, quietly or fanatically, wholly amorous. Dissipation of the glance within itself, fusion and permutation of the one and the other, neither seeing nor seen, neither subject nor object; love in the feminine, against which mystical experiences stumble, coils up around the mother-child's tight embrace, the blurr of images prior to the "mirror stage." A swallowing up of the imagination by the real, the emergence of the imagination under the aegis of the symbolic, the

¹³¹ Silverman (1988), p. 119.

beginning and absolute of the ideal - this feminine facet of love is perhaps the most subtle sublimation of the secret, psychotic ground of hysteria (*Tales*: 112-3)

A narcissism without calling itself as such: here we have displayed the narrator's feminine signature, her personal investments staked out yet *mediated* through a comment on the way intellectual reflection constitutes itself *per se* and additionally, how it constitutes itself most fruitfully in certain women. For it seems to me that this particular focus on amorous reflection as problematising subject and object, and as composing both fusion and dissipation, is not merely linked to a female resolution of reflection and therefore something optional, but is constitutive for Kristeva of *all* reflection. The "beginning and absolute of the ideal" locates the feminine at the very heart of love and knowledge; a feminine that places *some* women (especially herself) in a potentially advantageous position. Just as the hysteric is able to take herself for someone else, just as she is able to establish a relation to an idealisable object even if she tends to deny her difference from that object, the female intellectual is presumably in a better position to speak of love than anyone else: provided of course, that she "move away"; that she sublimate her narcissistic longings through contemplation of an other/Other.

I do not think however, that Kristeva is a feminist. She is clearly hostile to the feminist assumptions regarding group identity (even if critical theory has pluralised the question of identity), political projects, and the continued emphasis on oppositional narratives. She does not set out to explicitly privilege women in her research, although a very strong implicit discourse in the text does reveal a surprising degree of enthusiasm, even commitment to fashioning a distinct and valued place from which a female intellectual may ask questions about theoretical thought. Kristeva appears to affirm the particularity of feminine experience while insisting that it accept the constraints of language. Hence the topography of this special place of reflection still rests on many of the exclusions and preconditions of a Lacanian discourse on subjectivity: namely that castration (loss) is uni-

versal and that women assume a different position in relation to the phallus, which then makes them in Kristeva's eyes, *potentially* the most qualified to interrogate and displace truth. Yet in conforming to the terms of the psychoanalytical narrative, she also manages to critique them, to make them strange. I cannot tell whether ultimately she finds privileging the feminine, or estranging our domesticated habits of thought the most compelling. Suffice it to say that *Tales of Love* is comprised of two imbricated discourses: the first, an explicit formalised narrative on amatory styles which reveals the fragility of all identity and which strips love of its culturally normative representation, and the second, a more surreptitious and personally engaged commentary. Love problematises the referent and leads me out of habitual patterns of speech into a place where my identity founders but is also renewed. I can claim a limited position of privilege for the female intellectual, but only if this position is in constant transformation towards an Other. When the non-objectal nature of transference is forgotten and the female intellectual or "the body" is elevated to the position of a Universal category, it becomes as oppressive and phallic as any other representation. Thus in reading Kristeva on love, the demands of my ideal ego and my ego ideal are gratified in this complex kind of textual doubling. And if I submit to the terms of her discourse, through transference I find my subjectivity revived; not through a transcendent experience (or at least as it has traditionally been represented), but within "the infinity of the signifier." (*Tales*: 277)

4. 6. V. conclusion: love as transference

In the final analysis, it is love (and being) we are *talking* about: the utterance precedes the propositional act. (*Tales*: 268) Where subjectivity is set in motion with the Other through utterance, modifying my speech and my being, the transference relation becomes the privileged site of exchange: "The univocity of signs undergoes equivocality and is resolved in a more or less undecidable connotation when the subject of the utterance, in a state of transference (of love) toward the other transposes the same process of identification, of transference, to the units of

language - the signs." (*Tales*: 275) Spacing is here redrawn to accomodate a sublime, loving immanence/"transcendence" always already folded within the subject. "Home" and its supports have been revolutionised.

Kristeva characterises transference as the most costly form of love relationship possible. Love in analysis is a transference that Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams* initially called *Verschiebung*, a displacement of meaning and intensity, and later *Übertragung*, a displacement of love toward the analyst.¹³² Kristeva's understanding of the role of the analyst in psychotherapy has less to do with mastery than a passionate involvement and openness to self-transformation: "The analyst is within love from the start, and if he forgets it he dooms himself not to perform an analysis." (*Tales*: 13) I personally find these comments on the role of transference to be the most humane and satisfying aspects of the Kristevan corpus. What often read as Manichean preoccupations with re-reading metaphysics on the one hand and privileging femininity on the other are to some extent mitigated by the author's tribute to the mutually transformative role played by speech in analysis. Although Kristeva does not advocate the kind of identity for men and women that I still consider to be necessary for survival, she does insist that the analyst assist in alleviating suffering, and helping analysands to build imaginary spaces which they can inhabit: "Help them not to suffer from being mere extras in their lives, or splinters of parceled out bodies carried along by the spate of their pleasure [or pain]. Help them, then, to speak and write themselves in unstable, open, undecidable spaces." (*Tales*: 380) The world of seeming, when associated with a primary metaphor that calls us to life within a discourse of love for an Other offers the only possible shelter today. In light of which the strange landscape produced by poetic language and the horror of the body's uncontrollable interior find themselves accomodated within a new dwelling where Kristeva's fascination for estranging language and identity is tempered by a gen-

¹³² See "The Dynamics of Transference (1912), SE XII, pp. 99-108; Observations on Transference-love" (1915), SE XII, pp. 159-71; "Constructions in Analysis" (1937), SE XXIII, pp. 257-69; and "Analysis Terminable and Interminable" (1937), SE XXIII, pp. 216-53.

uine recognition of human suffering and desire.

The ideal model of subjectivity affirmed here is that of an "open system . . . capable of innovation."¹³³ Open systems presuppose a mutually transforming interchange of information where neither party is closed off to the other. The outside is not seen as a threat to be mastered or feared, but rather as a difference to remain in dialogue with, perhaps even eventually to be introjected by the psyche without excessive naturalisation or amputation of its intrinsic alterity.¹³⁴ It is at this point that Kristeva's critique of narratives of appropriation and desire, particularly when those tendencies remain unacknowledged by psychoanalysis and philosophy, becomes most acute. When there is genuine exchange beyond the pain of separation there exists a space of play, where we indulge in games of seeming and imagination. Lacan had taken Freud's *fort/da* game as the prototype of playful desire, yet clearly, even while the infant experiences loss and translates that loss through play into a primitive binary language, he is *master* of his own game. Like play, the symbolic masters presence and absence.¹³⁵ Kristeva reads play as something more costly. "Imagination succeeds," she writes, "where the narcissist becomes hollowed out and the paranoid fails." (*Tales*: 381)

The process of imagination or seeming that underlies the analytical "act of love", unlike pathological narcissism or paranoia, gives the object, the other, a subjectivity. "Paranoid" thought as we have seen in Kristeva's reading of Hegel in Chapter Three, amputates the object and attempts to master it through analysis. It rests on a fantasised "petit objet *a*"; a part object which we both desire to fix forever and find elusive. Here the superego rules, and idealising sets its stakes so high that the desired object faces silence or erasure. Paranoia is an ossifying of narcissism. The narcissist recognises his specular reflection alone, therefore he

¹³³ Lisa Appignanesi ed. (1984), p. 21.

¹³⁴ See also Lechte (1990), pp. 182-4; and "Evenement et révélation" in *L'Infini*, No. 5 (Winter 1984), pp. 3-11.

¹³⁵ See Maria Ruegg, "Metaphor and Metonymy: the Logic of Structuralist Rhetoric" in *Glyph*, Vol. 6, (1977), pp. 141-157, especially pp. 152-3.

can only know emptiness; his emerging love turns to paranoia and mistaking himself for the other, he dies. Freud too couldn't recognise his desire, and substituted his fantasy ("Dora wishes to give me a kiss") for the narrative of transference and counter-transference. Thus what remains according to Kristeva is the imagination; not unanalysed so that it comes to echo Nietzsche's "power to the imagination", but as an endless series of creative illusions, redemptive works in progress constructed jointly by two loving, speaking subjects. "He" and "she"? "Me" and "you"? Ego and ideal? Ultimately transference love renders such distinctions meaningless. I could suggest that privileging a dialogical interactive relationship reflects a profoundly feminine inclination, but to do so in any *final* sense would be to surrender to a sentimental, romanticised reading of woman. Kristeva's later writing on the place of woman is undoubtedly more "racist" than in *Revolution in Poetic Language*, but even when we discover an insistent feminine voice that has managed to withstand a horror of the maternal, its claims to identity are immediately challenged by the provisionality of interpretation. When the analyst chooses to write about love, she becomes fully implicated. Drawn in through transference, she temporarily loses her female specificity and becomes engaged in a more generous, co-operative venture between two subjects who confront each other face to face, passing through the silvery pool of Narcissus to a place whose form we perceive arising out of our wake to greet us.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

HOW DOES ONE SPEAK TO JULIA KRISTEVA?

Henrik Ibsen's play *The Master Builder* is the story of the fall of Halvard Solness, whose brilliant career finally exacts the terrible price of his own life. Solness's dreams of falling co-exist with a fascination to build a tower of such a dizzy height that "it left your senses reeling".¹ His self-acclaiming "think what it is to be . . . the master builder!"² is later undermined by Hilde who provokes the realisation that Solness's ruthless desire for mastery has led him to build on too narrow a foundation. Climbing beyond his limits to the topmost spire of his new home, he falls; unable, perhaps even unwilling, to descend.

With Solness in mind, Ludwig Binswanger has named this experience of overreaching oneself *Verstiegenheit*, where the person driven beyond his own limits "may well end up falling to his . . . destruction."³ Paul de Man uses Binswanger's insight into *Verstiegenheit* to launch a critique of the notion of the empirical self. For de Man, all art carries within it a transcendental moment that works not to affirm the self's grounding in reality, but to provide a knowledge of the impending fall from grace into the "barren world" of "non-empirical thought."⁴ What attracts me to Ibsen firstly however, is simply the image of a master builder so caught up in the dizzying verticality of his constructions that he fails to allow for his own safe return to the ground.

¹ *The Master Builder*, Henrik Ibsen. *The Oxford Ibsen*, Vol VII, Ed. James Walter McFarlane (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 435.

² Ibsen (1966), p. 374.

³ Paul de Man, "Ludwig Binswanger and the Sublimation of the Self." In de Man (1971), p. 47.

⁴ de Man (1971), pp. 48, 49.

When I read Julia Kristeva I am often reminded of the heady risks of *Verstiegenheit*. *Revolution in Poetic Language* is the work of just such a triumphant master builder. Its dizzy verticals define new heights for conceptual thought; its dimensions seem to leap foundationless into a real of pure ontology. Language as the unknown confronts us with an implacable strangeness that is as destructive as it is compelling. Reading Kristeva, I am drawn into the challenge to climb, and thus master what appear as vast expanses of vertical space. And so the experience of discovering one is already too high to descend has been a real and discomforting aspect to my study of Kristeva's texts. On the other hand, the topographies that unfold are just as likely to reflect a *lack* of space. The aggressive vocabulary of revolutionary semiotics terrorises the reader and reminds of her own insignificance. It deprives her of the comforts of a domesticated dwelling where "home" means secure landmarks and a familiar speech. This lack of space is at its most intense when the figure of the mother appears on the scene. The origin of our conception of intimate space, the maternal and the female body are often represented as entities whose mass blocks the subject's access to his own space. In each case however, whether privileging verticality or the horizontal, Kristevan discourse leads the female voyager across a conceptually dense landscape that makes few concessions to her desire for lucidity.

What saves Kristeva's writing from excessive ambition or obscurity though, is the space it allows for the elaboration of the "feminine". Never the radically anti-phenomenological feminine of deconstruction, nor the privileged ground of Irigaray's sexually specific female voice, Kristeva's feminine takes in both of these readings but ultimately rejects them for something more complicated, more difficult to establish, but which comes to provide the kind of embodiment that can sustain the reader's own intellectual quest. Rosi Braidotti has argued that Kristeva makes no attempt to "theorize the steps of transition from Woman to women, from the symbolic to the empirical . . . sexual difference, that is, the difference that women *make*, is never mentioned in Kristeva's discourse."⁵ I think she is mistaken. As I have shown, there

⁵ Rosi Braidotti, *Patterns of Dissonance: A Study of Women in Contemporary Culture*, trans. Elizabeth Guild (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), p. 231.

are strategic moments in Kristeva's texts when she quite clearly does appeal to sexual difference. The figures of the female analyst, the woman as dissident, the woman who is at once mother, intellectual and voyager, are all seen to effect subtle differences in the discourses of criticism, analysis and philosophy. When these figures are represented in the symbolic of the text, they carry a trace of the unsymbolised real which dislocates conventional representation, and renews those symbolic and imaginary registers from which our speech and culture draw.⁶ They also refer to, but are not identical with, what Braidotti terms "the empirical". They refer, in other words, to "you" and to "me", and to our socio-cultural histories. This sociological component representing the "difference that women *make*" is significantly less important to Kristeva than psychic and linguistic structures that displace sexual difference, nevertheless its insistent presence in her work is able to be read.

Some eighteen years earlier, that notorious trip to China had led her to suggest that sexual difference could perhaps best be registered as the "thin line" of a "'little likeness/difference' in opposition to a 'big likeness/difference.'"⁷ This sense of a "thin line" and a small difference is what remains even in the later texts which have explicitly abandoned a dialogue with feminism. The difference that women make for Kristeva is therefore a real difference, but in order to forestall the need female voyagers have to settle down and make a permanent home for themselves, a difference that inevitably submits to the play of language. Speech recognises sexual difference by transforming it into shifting sites of enunciation.

While not wishing to discount Kristeva's hostility towards feminism, it seems to me that her insistence on such a transformation arises from a concern to open subjectivity to the possibility of continuous and revivifying change. The mutual resentment present in the opposition man/woman, like that of the master/slave couple, can be

⁶ For a discussion of the displacing effects of the real and the bodily "remnant" it produces in Kristeva, see her essay "The Speaking Subject" in Marshall Blonsky ed., *On Signs: A Semiotics Reader* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), pp. 210-220.

⁷ Josette F  ral, "China, Women and the Symbolic: An Interview With Julia Kristeva." *Sub-Stance* No. 13, (1976), p. 18.

transcended, Kristeva believes, if and only if the encounter with the other is made in the recognition that one's own subjectivity is always already founded on otherness. Affects shatter the fixity of identity and when housed within a transactive kind of speech, bend the drives' compulsion to master towards an enigmatic but loving "exterior". Transcendence is not an Absolute point fixed permanently outside the system, but a fold or an exteriority within the psyche. To repeat, the Absolute is not self-sufficient, but "from the outset in and for itself beside us and wants to be beside us". To be both at home and not at home with oneself therefore, provides the only means to accomodate the speech of the other without mastery or obsequiousness. It grants to the other a strangeness that need no longer be abyssal, but merely the prelude to a new, momentarily unrecognisable form of intimacy.

I do not think that *feminine* specificity need be completely eliminated in this representation. In fact, its elusive materiality may operate as a real check on Kristeva's tendency to erase the particular markings of place and face in the becoming subject's dazzling confrontation with the Other.⁸

The subject of *Revolution in Poetic Language* lost all sense of himself in the violent processes of language invested with the semiotic; the subject of *Powers of Horror*, terrified in the face of an overwhelming materiality, failed to find his place. Most often, these experiences were registered as a fascination with loss, death, and absence that finds an echo in Binswanger's *Verstiegenheit*. What was lacking in the earlier writing on language and the body then, was a sense of reconciliation with the Other: of love, and of renewal as forgiveness. These are undoubtedly theological qualities, and in one way they appear to suggest a hefty re-investment in idealism, despite Kristeva's claims to the contrary.

⁸ In her preoccupation with facelessness, particularly in *Tales*, Kristeva seems close to Blanchot. As Steven Shaviro remarks, "Blanchot is close to Levinas in discovering intimacy at its highest pitch in the passive and neutral contact of the Face . . . There is a strange blankness and tonelessness at the heart of passion, an 'absence' corresponding to what Levinas calls the 'nudity' of the Face." This is a point I alluded to in Chapter One. Unfortunately Shaviro's commentary on Blanchot came too late to make closer use of it. See his *Passion and Excess: Blanchot, Bataille, and Literary Theory* (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1990), p. 157.

While I cannot entirely separate *Tales of Love* from the idealism it claims to displace, I must insist on the unique relation that Kristeva has attempted to establish here and elsewhere between the body, a loving epiphany and speech. Once the body is understood as a textual body in constant transference to an other whose appearance is both immediate and unmediated, the hostile opposition that has characterised the relation between matter and language loses its relentless hold. It then becomes possible to support the notion of an unnameable mystery at the heart of speech without falling into permanent abjection. What strangeness remains does so less as a radical deracination than as a willingness to be placed on trial/in process through the enunciation of the other. Female identity is hardly romanticised over the masculine, for the encounter with alterity unsettles all homes and identities. Moreover, female intellectuals are just as susceptible as their male counterparts to overreaching themselves. But it is equally likely that their experience of cultural marginality, when combined with the disciplines of analysis and critical thought, may lend them a subtle advantage. Such an experience enables them at times to read and write *differently*, and when difference is maintained as an elusive "thin line", speech between two subjects is at its maximum point of transformation - estrangement re-inhabited.

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